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THE NEW YORKER



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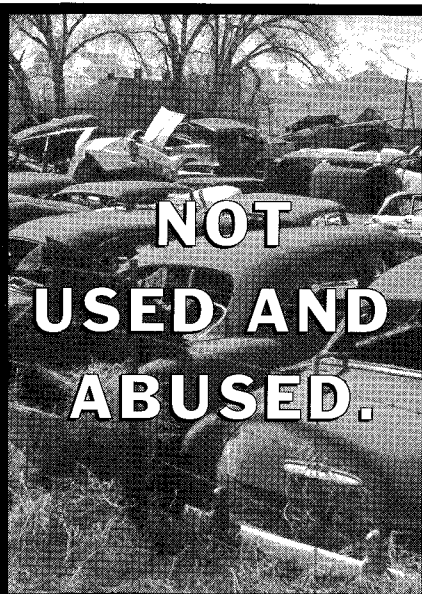
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THE NEW YORKER

JUNE 4, 2001

8 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

31 THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Bush looks for friends; a singer's last song.

Joe Klein 38 LETTER FROM LONDON

Labour's Love Lost

Tony Blair's troubled road to a landslide.

Adam Lehnner 43 SHOUTS & MURMURS

An Antidote to "The Elements of Style"

John LaBr 44 ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

The Shock of the Good

Broadway's sweetheart lands in a sitcom.

Jerome Groopman 52 ANNALS OF MEDICINE

The Thirty Years' War

Is there a better way to fight cancer?

Alex & Laila, Rebecca Mead 58 SHOWCASE

The one-man "Moby-Dick."

Paul Hoffman 64 PROFILES

The Pandolfini Defense

You don't have to be crazy to play great chess.

Marisa Silver 74 FICTION

"Gunsmoke"

THE CRITICS

Anthony Lane 82 THE CURRENT CINEMA

"Pearl Harbor."

Peter Schjeldahl 85 THE ART WORLD

Vija Celmins's spiderwebs.

Hilton Als 90 A CRITIC AT LARGE

The life of Chester Himes.

BOOKS

97 Briefly Noted

Joan Acocella 98 DANCING

The choreographer Christopher Wheeldon.

John LaBr 100 THE THEATRE

"Glimmer, Glimmer, and Shine."

POEMS

Kay Ryan 48 "Things Shouldn't Be So Hard"

Eavan Boland 73 "Quarantine"

COVER "Newfound Freedom," by J.J. Sempé THE BACK PAGE "What Will Happen to the Grad?," by Seymour Chwast DRAWINGS Christopher Weyant, Lee Lorenz, Michael Maslin, Barbara Smaller, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Jack Ziegler, Robert Weber, Rox Chast, Frank Cotham, Charles Barsotti, William Hamilton, Danny Shanahan, P. C. Vey, Leo Cullum, William Haefeli, David Sipress, Alex Gregory, Victoria Roberts

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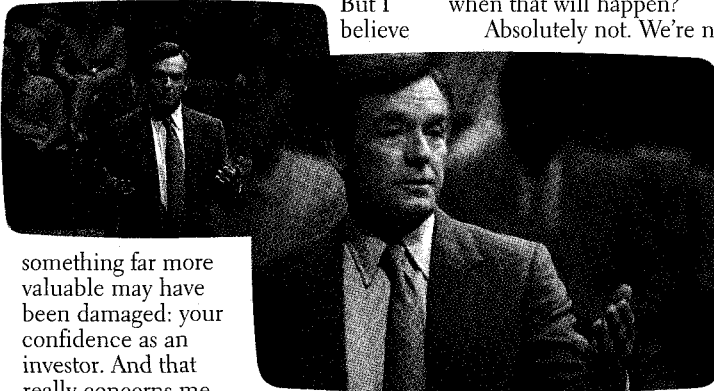
"In today's market doing nothing could be risky."

[Commentary on today's market.]

by Charles R. Schwab

Some of your investments probably got hit hard recently. High tech, overseas, the Dow, it hasn't been pretty.

But I believe



something far more valuable may have been damaged: your confidence as an investor. And that really concerns me.

So I want you to take a deep breath, relax, and read a few things I've learned over forty years in the investment business.

WILL THIS DOWNTURN EVER END?

Yes, obviously we have been experiencing a market correction. But no, I don't believe it will go on forever.

Why do I think this? In my years as an investor I've seen twelve such drops, including this one.

The Schwab Center for Investment Research® tracks and analyzes market moves like this and uses the past to provide perspective on the future.

We can tell you that some drops only lasted a matter of months, and a few took years to end, but end they all

did as will this one.

Now, can I or the Schwab analysts with all their facts and figures tell you when that will happen?

Absolutely not. We're not magicians.

All I can promise is that, yes, as long as history repeats itself, there will be an end to this downturn. Twelve previous times, when all

was said and done, stocks have typically outperformed other types of investments.

It's a pretty solid chance this time around will be the same.

After all, history is on our side.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSIFICATION.

If you went a little overboard on technology stocks like many others did, you may have just received a solid lesson in the need for portfolio diversification.

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GETTING YOUR CONFIDENCE BACK.

In an up market, it's easy to get seduced by commission-compensated brokers offering hot ideas!

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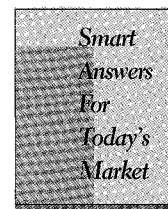
They say every cloud has a silver lining. I believe it's truer than ever right now.

As an investor you may have taken a few lumps. But react to them in a positive way, and you can end up stronger and wiser, with the kind of portfolio that's ready to weather whatever the future holds.

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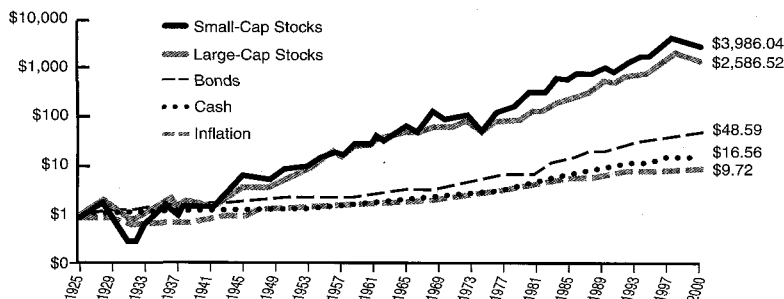
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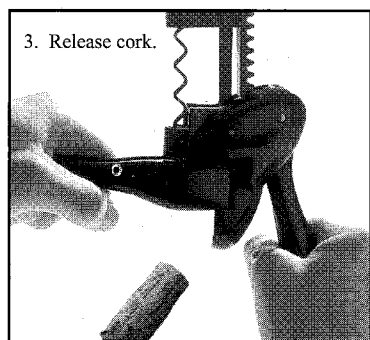
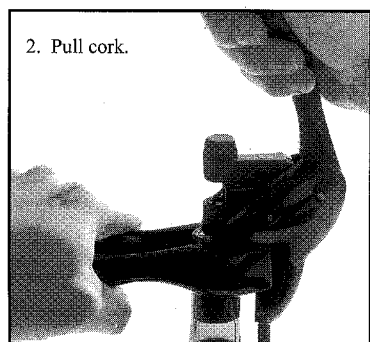
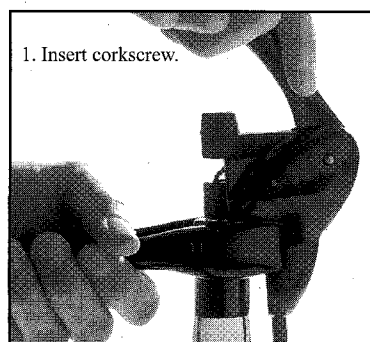
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The chart above illustrates the growth in value of \$1.00 invested in various financial instruments from 1925 through 2000. Figures above indicate the value of that same \$1.00 at the end of 2000. Note: Results assume reinvestment of dividends on stocks and coupons on bonds, and no taxes or transaction costs. Generally, small-cap stocks are in the bottom 50% of publicly traded companies based on market capitalization. These stocks are subject to greater volatility. Source: Stocks, Bonds, Bills & Inflation 2001 Yearbook. © 2001 Ibbotson Associates, Inc. Based on the copyrighted works by Ibbotson and Sinquefeld. All rights reserved. Used with permission. The indices representing each asset class are S&P 500 Index (large-cap stocks), CRSP 6-10 Index (small-cap stocks), Ibbotson Intermediate U.S. Government Bond Index (bonds), and 30-day Treasury bills (cash). Indices are unmanaged, do not incur fees or expenses and cannot be invested in directly. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Schwab Center for Investment Research is a division of Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. © 2001 Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Member SIPC/NYSE (0301-13190).

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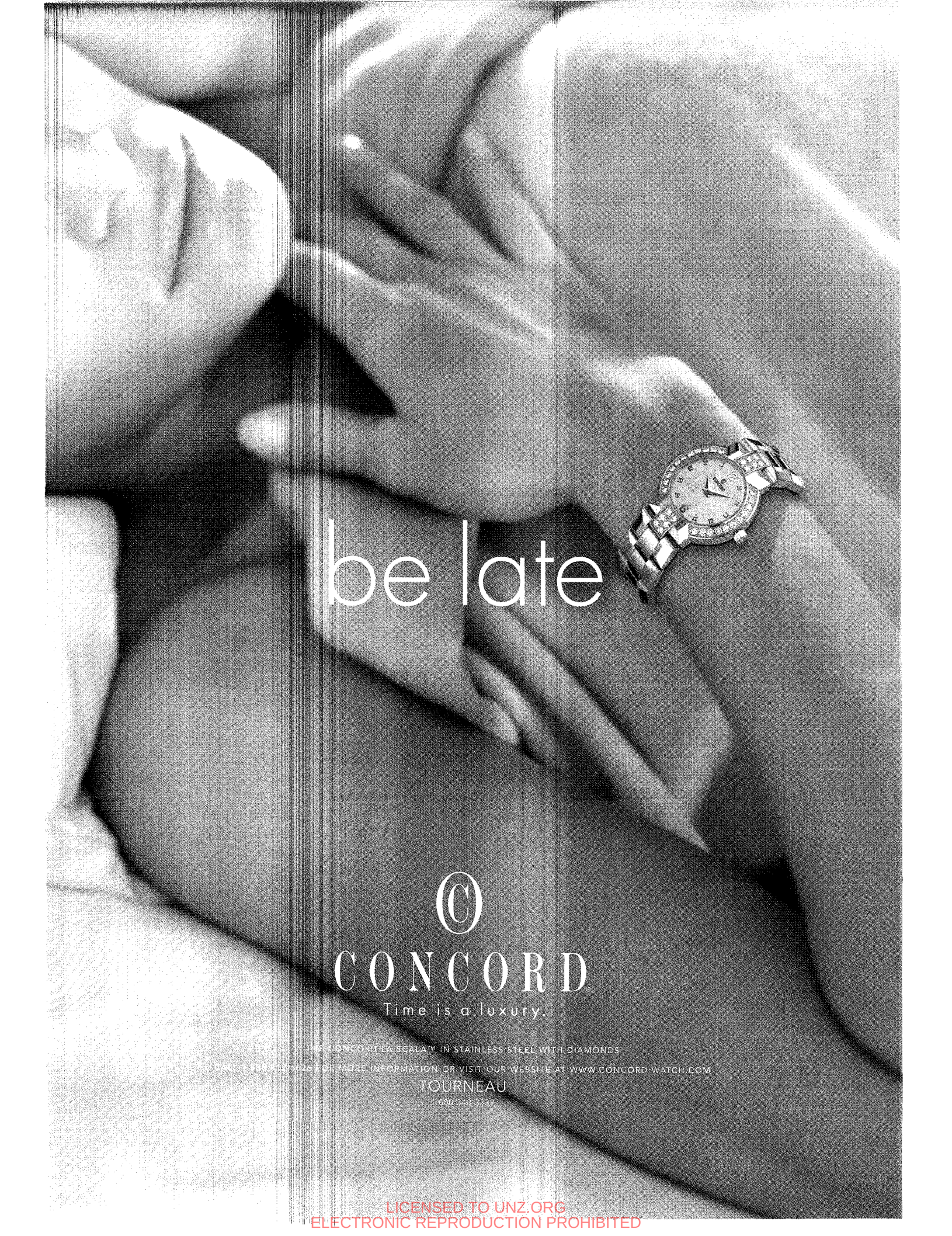
Seymour Chwast (The Back Page, p. 102) is an illustrator and designer. ♦



"I don't know what the big deal is. I've been having rolling blackouts for years."

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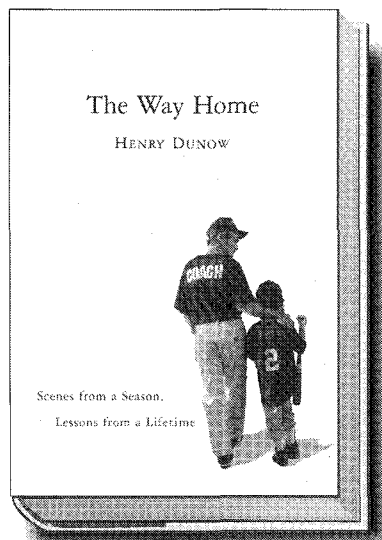
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THE MAIL

THE G-MAN'S AGENDA

The most striking aspect of the story that Elsa Walsh tells about Louis Freeh's tenure as the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—and the one she most underplays—is his flagrant disloyalty to President Clinton, the man who appointed him ("Louis Freeh's Last Case," May 14th). Freeh's stated unwillingness to keep the President informed, his moves to circumvent the Administration's foreign-policy prerogatives, and his treacherous praise for Kenneth Starr—"We have all been greatly impressed with your sacrifice, persistence, and uncompromising personal and professional integrity"—suggest that he conducted a political vendetta against the President. Someone in Freeh's office also leaked confidential memos about him to Republican senators, allowing them to claim, among other things, that Clinton had obstructed justice. But it was Freeh, and not his boss, who politicized the F.B.I.

Morton Wachspress
Woodmere, N.Y.

On June 25, 1996, I was one of the three sentries who, as Walsh describes, stood on top of Khobar Towers Building 131 as the truck carrying a terrorist bomb pulled up. Nineteen American servicemen were killed in the blast that followed. The incident is never far from my thoughts. I am still in the military; I teach at an anti-terrorism school for the Air Force, and I recount the events of that day to each class. I tell my students what we're up against, and what we have to do to protect ourselves, but one thing I've never been able to explain is why no one was ever brought to justice in that case. I've been waiting for a while. After reading Walsh's article, I now at least have a better sense of how what should have been a law-enforcement investigation got tangled up in politics. I also have a new respect for Louis Freeh and what he stands for, and if I ever meet him I'd like to shake his hand.

T. Sgt. Alfredo Guerrero
Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.

Walsh suggests that the Islamic Republic of Iran was somehow involved in the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, and that the order for the bombing came from the highest levels of our government. These allegations are simply absurd. Iran had no involvement of any kind in that bombing. Our country has been the victim of a rush to judgment before: in 1996, Iran was singled out as a suspect in the crash of T.W.A. Flight 800 before it was discovered that the accident was caused by a mechanical failure. Iran has become an easy target for the United States, which mistakenly believes that by portraying us as a pariah nation it can play us off against other countries in the Persian Gulf. As Walsh's article shows, personal differences among top Washington officials—who at times stoop to petty backbiting—have also played a disproportionate role in shaping American policy. In this chaotic situation, Iran has been given the short end of the stick.

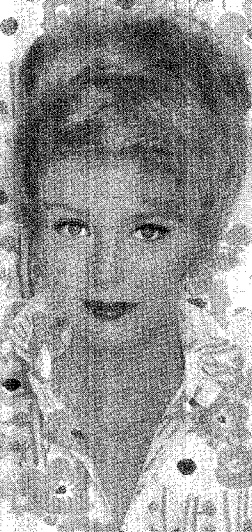
M. Hossein Nosrat
Press Secretary, Permanent Mission of the
Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
New York City

Walsh describes Wen Ho Lee, whose prosecution became an embarrassment for Freeh's F.B.I., as a "Chinese scientist," despite the fact that Lee is an American who lives outside Los Alamos, New Mexico. Would Walsh describe Edward Teller, who was born in Budapest, as a Hungarian scientist, or Madeleine Albright as a Czech diplomat? What's the difference between them and Lee? The accent he hasn't shaken? The color of his skin?

Chun Wa Wong
Professor of Physics, U.C.L.A.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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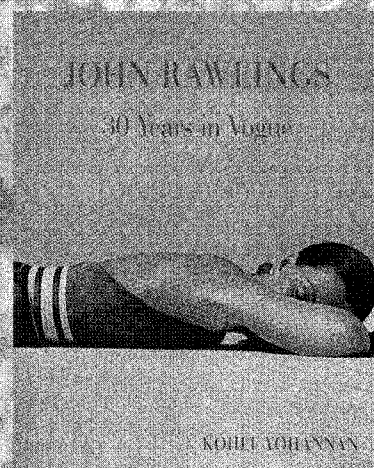


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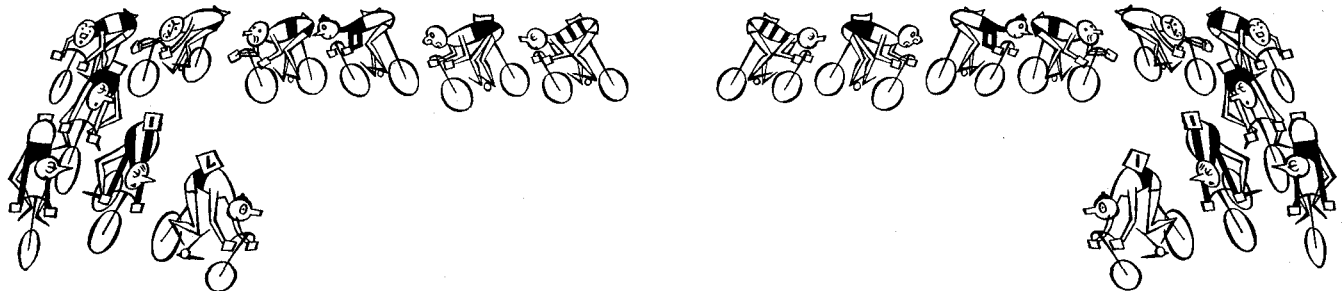
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THE THEATRE OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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BLUE

Phylicia Rashad is the star of a new comedy by Charles Randolph-Wright, with music by Nona Hendryx. Previews begin June 1. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

BYRD'S BOY

Bruce J. Robinson's drama, about an encounter between a night watchwoman and a homeless man who believes he's the son of Admiral Byrd. Previews begin May 30. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

CHAUER IN ROME

The latest play by John Guare, set in Italy during the final year of the last millennium. Nicholas Martin is the director. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

THE CREDEAUX CANVAS

Michael Mayer directs a play by Keith Bunin, about three ambitious East Villagers with a scheme. In previews through June 3. Opens June 5 at 7. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

THE DOG PROBLEM

David Rabe's new play, about a man, his dog, and the Mafia. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

FREE MARKET

Eight short plays about the workplace—by Jim Grimsley, Julie Jensen, Sachi Oyama, OyamaO, Guillermo Reyes, Elaine Romero, Karen Sunde, and William Wise—staged as a single play by the Working Theatre. Previews June 1-3. Opens June 4 at 8 and runs through July 1. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 279-4200.)

HAMLET

Simon Russell Beale portrays the Prince, in a Royal National Theatre staging of Shakespeare's play. Directed by John Caird. May 30-June 1 at 7:30 and June 2 at 2 and 7:30. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

KIKI & HERB: STOP, DROP & ROLL

The drag duo otherwise known as Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman, in their latest show. Previews June 1-2. Opens June 3 at 8. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680.)

THE LAST LETTER

The documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman adapted this drama, staged by the Comédie-Française, from a chapter out of the novel "Life and Fate," by Vasily Grossman. Two performances only, June 1-2 at 8. In French with English supertitles. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160.)

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A NAUGHTY KNIGHT

Chuck Strand wrote the music and lyrics and William Martin wrote the book for this musical loosely based on Mark Twain's "A Medieval Romance." A Jewish Repertory Theatre production. In previews through June 2. Opens June 3 at 7. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

NEW WORK

A work in progress from the Wooster Group, based on Paul Schmidt's translation of Racine's "Phèdre." Performances begin June 1 at 8 and continue through July 1. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

TICK, TICK... BOOM!

An autobiographical musical by the late Jonathan Larson ("Rent"). In previews. (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL

A kind of "My Fair Bat Boy," in which a half-bat, half-man—memorably played by Deven May—emerges from his childhood cave into adult bourgeois life. But the musical world he enters is one of darkness, not light, of ironies, not idealism, where plot is a history of abdications and song extolls the emptiness of all the standard credos—Christianity, family, community, love, redemption—and of the musical itself. It's a jejune vision, but a smart, playful, and funny one nonetheless. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/01.) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

BELLS ARE RINGING

Faith Prince and Marc Kudisch lead the cast in a revival of the 1956 Betty Comden-Adolph Green-Jule Styne musical. Tina Landau is the director. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

BLUR

A new comedy by Melanie Marnich, in which a teen-ager discovers she's going blind. Polly Draper and Angela Goethals are in the cast. Lynne Meadow is the director. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE BOOK OF LIZ

In the latest comedy by the brother-and-sister team of Amy and David Sedaris, Ms. Sedaris portrays the sweating, mousy Elizabeth, a demure Puritan

believer from the religious Squeamish Community who goes on a picaresque adventure after being refused the honor of organizing the Chastity Parade. As comic drama, the play is sort of an amateur fizzle, but it does offer the Sedarises the opportunity to tell some very good jokes in silly costumes and to bask in the smug downtown certainty of a soiled world. (4/9/01) (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200. Closes June 1.)

A CLASS ACT

Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With songs by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. Mr. Price is the director. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

ELI'S COMIN'

The late Laura Nyro's witty, passionate songs first came to public attention in 1968. This cycle of twenty of them, put together by Bruce Buschel and Diane Paulus, manages, without a spoken word, to tell the tale of a woman's life in the city—a tale of fun, temptation, loss, and redemption—without a false note (in any sense). The terrific Judy Kuhn leads the cast. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303. Closes June 2.)

ENSEMBLE STUDIO THEATRE

Series B in this year's six-week marathon runs through June 3 with plays by Frank D. Gilroy, Susan Kim, Laurence Klaván, and Ruth Kirschner. The marathon continues through June 17. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

FOLLIES

This revival of Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's landmark 1971 musical, which takes place at a reunion of Ziegfeld-like performers, is less lavish than the original production, but no matter: the show's real grandeur lies in its imaginative structure and the unfolding of its lyrically rich, resonant songs. In the hands of Matthew Warchus, who directed, the relentless, unblinking intelligence is intact. (4/23 & 30/01) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

FORTY-SECOND STREET

As a domineering diva who breaks her ankle before the big opening night, the wonderful Christine Ebersole steals the show in this revival of the 1980 tap musical based on the 1933 film. But it has to be said: it was probably easy to do. As the young chorine who steps in to save the day, Kate Levering doesn't have enough star power to shine above the legions of hoofers who crowd the stage, and Michael Cumpsty, as the gruff director, is sorely miscast. Still, if this sort of show is your cup of tea, the songs are wonderful and the dancing is fine—just know that the cup is not quite full. (Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

GEORGE GERSHWIN ALONE

A one-man portrait with music, written and performed by Hershey Felder and directed by Joel Zwick. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 349-6200.)

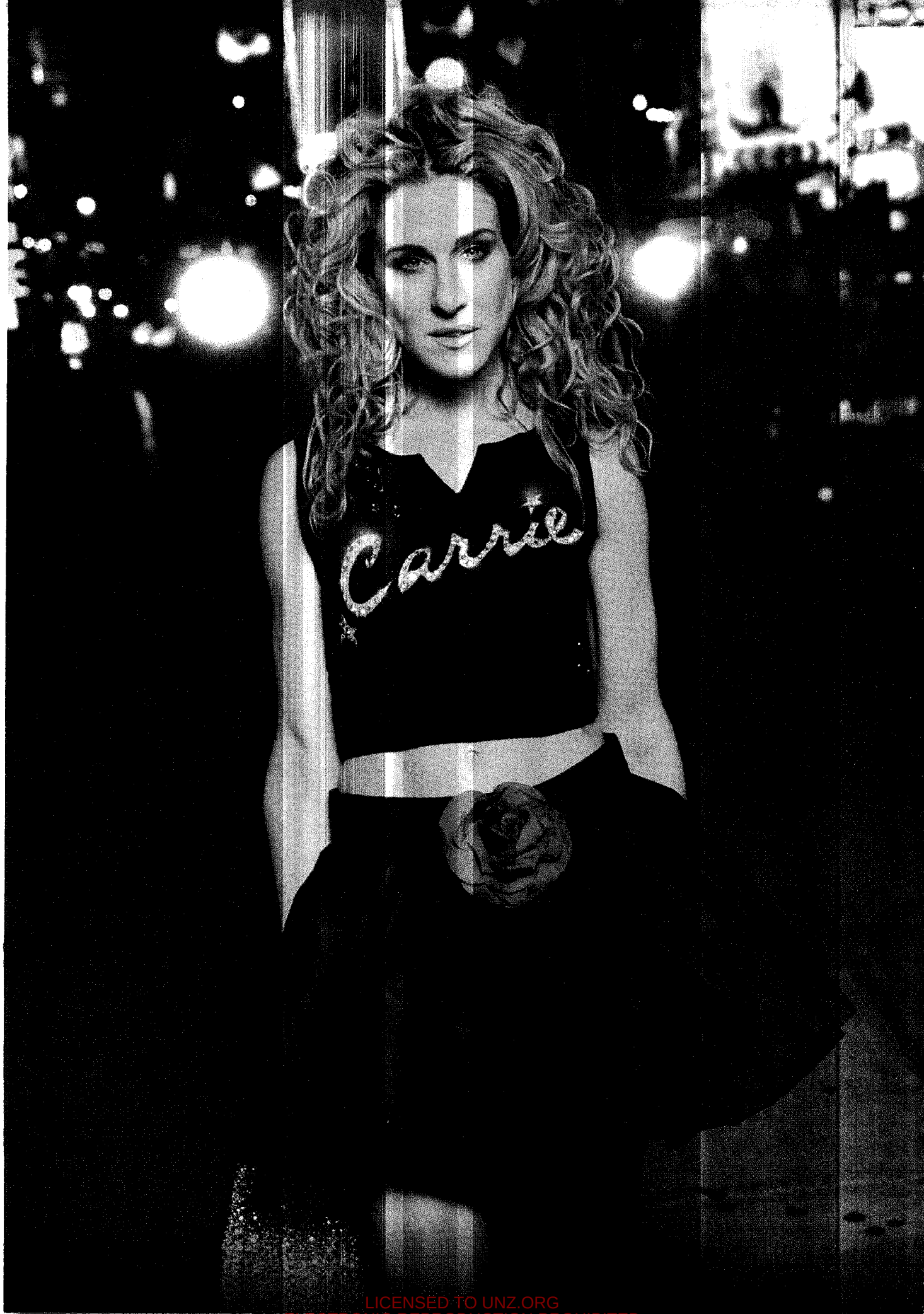
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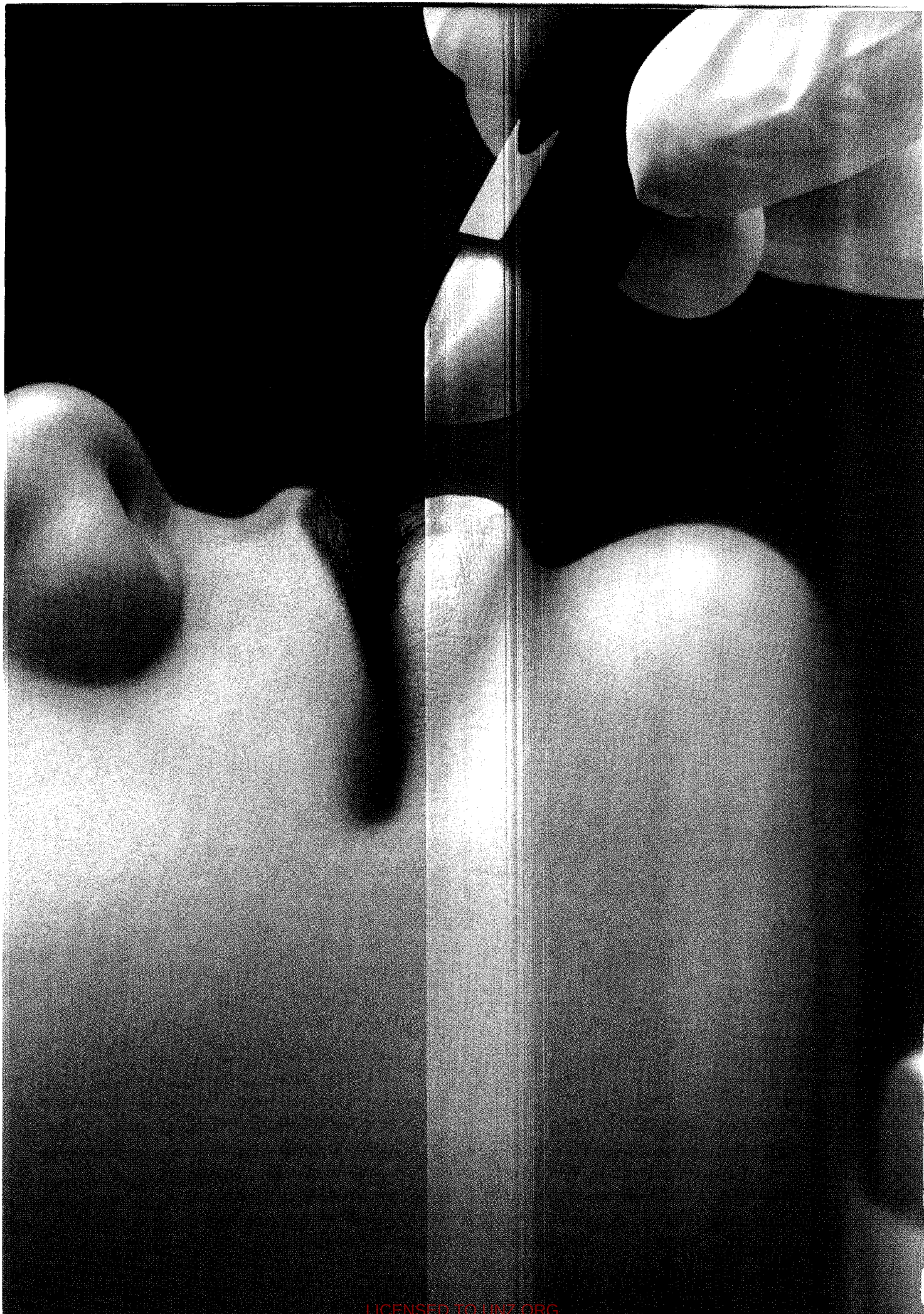
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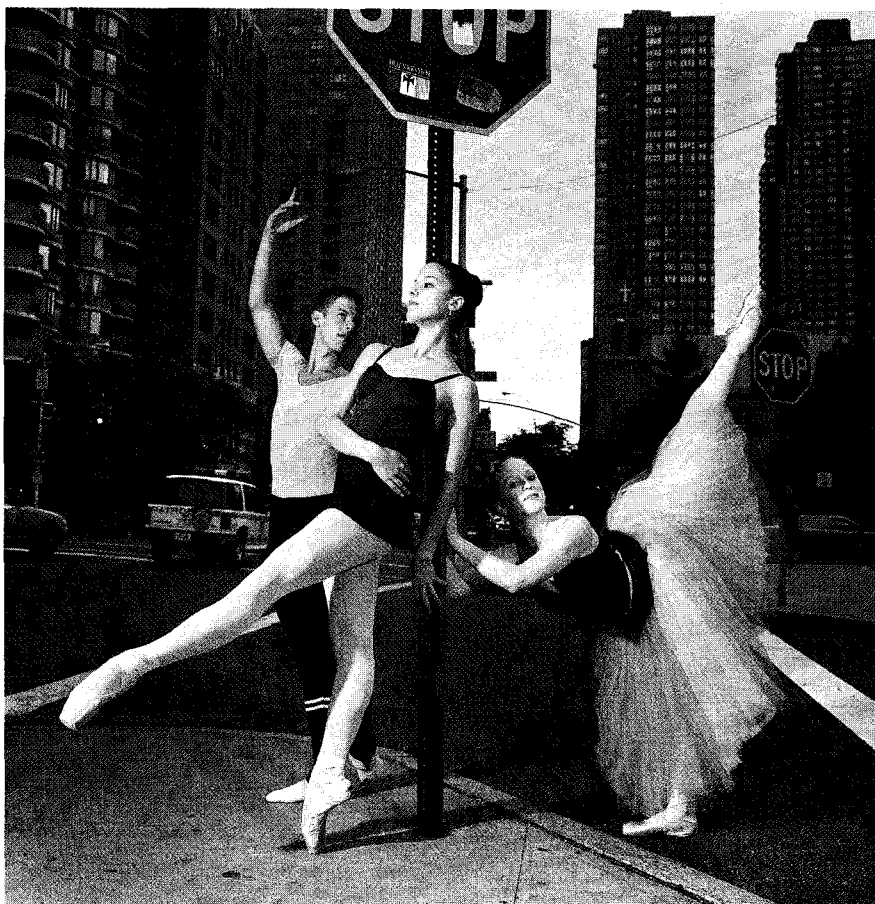
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Joshua Spell, Emily Tedesco, and Annabelle Wylie, of the School of American Ballet, performing at the Juilliard Theatre (see Dance).

GLIMMER, GLIMMER & SHINE

From Warren Leight ("Side Man"), a new drama about jazz musicians—twin brothers who were big-band trumpeters together in the fifties. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

I LOVE AMERICA

For her one-woman show about Dominicans seeking refuge in the United States, Lidia Ramirez conducted dozens of interviews with members of the Coast Guard and with civilians in New York, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)

THE INVENTION OF LOVE

Tom Stoppard's witty, challenging account of the classicist and poet A. E. Housman and the love that not only dared not speak its name but didn't even have one until 1895 (when the word "homosexual" was coined). Jack O'Brien's well-directed, lucid production features a sumptuous set by Bob Crowley and some fine acting, especially by Richard Easton as the elder/dead Housman—he parses every sentence and joke so that the audience is never at sea—and Robert Sean Leonard as the young classicist in love. David Harbour also turns in a vivid portrait as the sporty object of Housman's platonic affection. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

KING HEDLEY II

August Wilson's new play, set in Pittsburgh in 1985, is a tale of rage, redemption, and Reagan-omics. Its eponymous protagonist, played by Brian Stokes Mitchell, is eager to start anew after emerging from a long prison term for killing a man, but hard times and his own self-destructive ways seem to conspire against him. Despite some good performances by Viola Davis, Stephen McKinley Henderson, and Charles Brown, the play lacks psychological credibility, and its heavy cargo of symbolism and coincidence often makes it feel like a soap opera. Directed by Marion McClinton. (5/14/01) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

LIPSTICK TRACES

The rock critic Greil Marcus's 1989 book, "Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century," which traced the intellectual roots of punk music, wouldn't seem to hold much promise as a source of drama—and that's because it doesn't. Rather than connecting the dots for the audience, this diffuse pastiche by the Austin, Texas, troupe Rude Mechs places punk on a pop-cultural pedestal while consigning other notable anarchic movements and moments (France's Situationists, the plight of the sixteenth-century heretic John of Leiden and the Anabaptists, Dada) to a kind of silly oblivion. And with the focus on Malcolm McLaren's Machiavellian marketing of Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols, in the end it's the modern power spin that resonates. Fans hoping for a romp through the Pistols' brief reign will leave mostly unsatisfied, but they will get a look at the energetic work of some smart, talented, albeit not-ready-for-prime-time players. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 800-965-4827. Closes June 10.)

LOBBY HERO

In another era, the contrivances of Kenneth Lonergan's new play would have been called hokum. It's set in a Manhattan apartment-house lobby and involves a slacker security guard, his ambitious boss, and two cops (a sleazy guy and an inept woman, who are investigating a murder and having an affair). But because Lonergan is the writer and director of the moving and successful film "You Can Count on Me" and the author of the acclaimed plays "This Is Our Youth" and "The Waverly Gallery," the public is expecting him to aim high. He does, and misses. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

LOVE, JANIS

A musical play about Janis Joplin, at the spiffy new theatre that was formerly the Village Gate, built around her songs, writings, and interviews. Though it contains no new insight, it's a useful corrective to the drunken, drug-addicted legend, and the production is a fine one. Randal Myler directed with a sure eye for the telling detail, and the seven-member

band really cooks. Two singers alternate as "singing Janis"; on a recent night Cathy Richardson was in splendid voice and demeanor. The backbone of the evening, however, is Catherine Curtin's "speaking Janis." It's an intelligent, vulnerable, self-aware performance that transcends the Janis myth and showcases the talent of a powerful actress. (Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

MADAME MELVILLE

Mature audiences may be split down the middle on Richard Nelson's much lauded coming-of-age drama; in it the waifish former child star Macaulay Culkin (now twenty) portrays an American high-school student in nineteen-sixties Paris, who grows up at the hands of his much older French teacher (Joely Richardson, who seems to be channeling the spirit of Claudine Longet). Although it's about as fresh as a forgotten slice of Camembert at the back of your refrigerator, the play understandably evokes pleasurable adolescent fantasies for men. For the rest of the population, it's more likely to evoke the heebie-jeebies. Stale story aside, Culkin's stilted, singsongy delivery and fragile demeanor are so grating that even the most unstable, immature, or sexually predatory woman would kick him out of bed—if she let him get there at all. The bright light is Robin Weigert, who plays Richardson's live-wire neighbor, a recently liberated New Jersey housewife pursuing her dream of making a living as a cellist. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

NOCTURNE

In Adam Rapp's new drama, a young man must deal with the aftermath of his sister's death, which he accidentally caused. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200. Closes June 17.)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Dale Wasserman's severely dated adaptation of Ken Kesey's 1962 novel—a broad allegory, set in a mental hospital, about the perils of nonconformity—is a quaint relic, but as staged by Chicago's excellent Steppenwolf Theatre it's a well-acted one. Gary Sinise leads the cast, as the incorrigible mental patient Randle P. McMurphy. Terry Kinney is the director. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

ORESTES

William Burroughs, John Wayne Gacy, Bret Easton Ellis, and tabloid journalism figure into this adaptation, by Charles L. Mee, Jr., of the Euripides drama. (HERE, 145 5th Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes June 7.)

PEARL THEATRE COMPANY

Jean-François Regnard's 1708 comedy, "A Will of His Own," runs in repertory with Racine's "Andromache." (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes June 17.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY

In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby: the ravages of adulthood, the tidal wave of troubles and injuries that come with time. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic performances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

THE PRODUCERS

High-camp heaven from Mel Brooks, who wrote the music and the lyrics for this monster-hit version of his 1968 movie—in which two scoundrels try to bilk their investors by staging a surefire failure, entitled "Springtime for Hitler." What's first-rate about this particular seduction is Brooks's antic imagination and the atmosphere of audacious liberty with which he turns atrocity into travesty (a fabulous high-kicking chorus in swastika formation sings to "ev'ry hotzy-totsy Nazi"). With the help of his deft and witty co-author, Thomas Meehan, Brooks reins in his compulsion to tell four jokes where one will do, and the jokes he does tell almost always hit their marks. The performing centerpiece of the show is Nathan Lane, as the flamboyant huckster Bialystock; his kind of high-amperage panache is in limited supply these days, and both he and the excellent Matthew Broderick, as the hapless accountant Leo Bloom, deliver the mail. Expertly staged by Susan Stroman. (5/7/01) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

KRISTINE LARSEN

THE RIGHT WAY TO SUE

A successful career woman and Upper West Side mother keeps misplacing her newborn baby, in a comedy by Ellen Melaver, staged by New Georges. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202. Closes June 10.)

SEE BOB RUN

Daniel MacIvor's drama about a talkative hitchhiker (Susan O'Connor). (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 627-2556. Closes June 3.)

SHUT UP AND LOVE ME

The performance artist Karen Finley's latest one-woman show. Wednesdays through Sundays at 8, through June 2. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

SO LONG AGO I CAN'T REMEMBER:

A DIVINE COMEDY

The latest multimedia production by the troupe Gale Gates et al. takes its inspiration from Dante. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS

Marie Jones's play is set in an Irish village where a big-budget Hollywood movie is being made. Conleth Hill and Seán Campion play two extras in the movie and all thirteen other characters as well, including the movie's female star, its director, and various locals. Though the play has its clever ways when it comes to sending up both Hollywood and Irish mores, the stories told here aren't anything you haven't seen before. (4/16/01) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THIEF RIVER

Gregg Edelman stars in a new play by Lee Blessing, under the direction of Mark Lamos. (Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes June 17.)

URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL

A musical comedy by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis, about a city in a state of ecological disaster. John Rando is the director. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA

Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES

Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET

Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO

Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT

Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA

Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

THE DINNER PARTY

Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS

Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001:

A SPOOF ODYSSEY

Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

FOSSE

Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE FULL MONTY

Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT,

NOW CHANGE

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE

Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING

New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES

Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE MUSIC MAN

Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

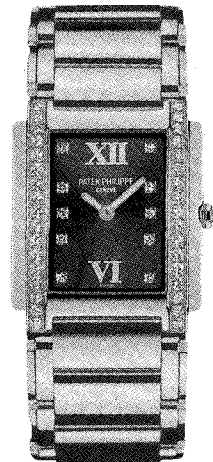
PERFECT CRIME

Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.



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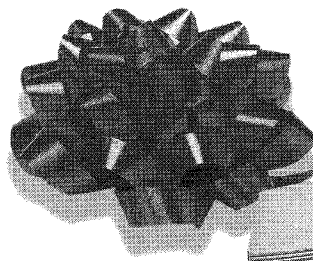


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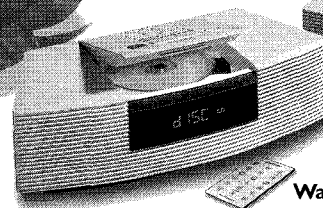
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THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF

Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT

Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW

Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.

STOMP

Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.

THE SYRINGA TREE

Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE

Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING

St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE**NEW YORK CITY BALLET**

May 30 at 8: "Swan Lake," "Stabat Mater," and "Cortège Hongrois." ♦ May 31 at 8: "Fanfare," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Polyphonia," and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3." ♦ June 1 at 8: "La Source," "Romeo and Juliet," "Polyphonia," and "La Sonambula." ♦ June 2 at 2: "Dances at a Gathering" and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3." ♦ June 2 at 8: "Square Dance," "Stabat Mater," and "Cortège Hongrois." ♦ June 3 at 3: "Swan Lake," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Polyphonia," and "Ancient Airs and Dances." ♦ June 5 at 8: "Episodes," "Burleske," and "Firebird." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through July 1.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

May 30 at 2 and 8 and May 31 at 8: "The Merry Widow." ♦ June 1 and June 4-5 at 8 and June 2 at 2 and 8: "Onegin." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. Through June 23.)

FORT WORTH DALLAS BALLET

The thirty-one-member troupe performs works by Kevin O'Day, Stanton Welch, and Peter Anastos. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. May 29-June 1 at 8, June 2 at 2 and 8, and June 3 at 2.)

SCHOOL OF AMERICAN BALLET

The school, the teaching arm of the New York City Ballet, presents its annual performances with a cast of top students—in past years, Merrill Ashley, Damian Woetzel, and Monique Meunier made their local debuts here. Suki Schorer, an S.A.B. teacher since 1972, rattles off what most have managed to learn—classical technique, musicality, Balanchine-style footwork—then pauses to laugh quickly and say, "You want them—what can I say?—to have a belief in themselves. You want life in the upper body—their life." By opening night, the life in the teen-agers always looks hopeful and blooming and exuberant, making for the perfect spring concert. This year's program includes "Telemann Overture Suite in E Minor," choreographed by the twenty-one-year-old N.Y.C.B. corps member Melissa Barak, a recent alumna of the school who has been making dances since she was eight, with her sister and friends, in the living room. She promises that her latest work is in the same spirit: "Strictly friends dancing together to music." (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 769-6600. June 2 at 2 and 8 and a benefit performance June 4 at 7.)

"RIVERDANCE—ON BROADWAY"

Not the Lord of the Dance with his shirt off and the leather truss. The other one. (Gershwin Theatre, 222 W. 51st St. 307-4100. May 29, May 31-June 1, and June 5 at 8; May 30 and June 2 at 2 and 8; and June 3 at 3. Through Aug. 26.)

"CRASH TEST DUMMIES"

The dance and performance troupe Antigravity presents a full-length work involving extreme product testing: catapulting onto mattresses, spinning upside down on test helmets, flying while wrapped in cellophane. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. May 31-June 1 at 7, June 2 at 2 and 7, and June 3 at noon and 5.)

"E-MOVES ON"

Aaron Davis Hall presents the two programs in its New Faces New Voices New Visions series, with young dancers and choreographers (such as Keila Cordova, Akiko Furukawa, and Gregory King) on June 1 at 8 and June 2 at 2; and a quartet of new works from established choreographers Eun Me Ahn, Nicholas Leichter, Earl Mosley, and Andrea E. Woods on June 2 at 8 and June 3 at 3. (City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7148.)

NANCY MEEHAN DANCE COMPANY

The choreographer's thirtieth-anniversary season includes a première and the revival of a work she made in her second year, "Bones Cascades Scrapes." (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. June 1-3 at 8:30.)

"AUSENCIA"

The Yugoslavian choreographer Andrea Perekovic and the filmmaker Michelle Lippitt join forces in a full-length work that blends Balkan folk music, super-8 film, and Sorbonne-style movement. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 388-9080. June 1-2 at 9.)

LA GUARDIA HIGH SCHOOL**DANCE CONCERT**

The 2001 graduating class performs works by Pat Catterson, H. T. Chen, Catherine Brikké, Elisa King, Abigail Levine, and Matthew Nee-

nan. (Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. 586-3500. May 31-June 1 at 7:30 and June 2 at 2 and 7:30.)

"THE NIGHT A METEOR FELL**THROUGH MY ROOF"**

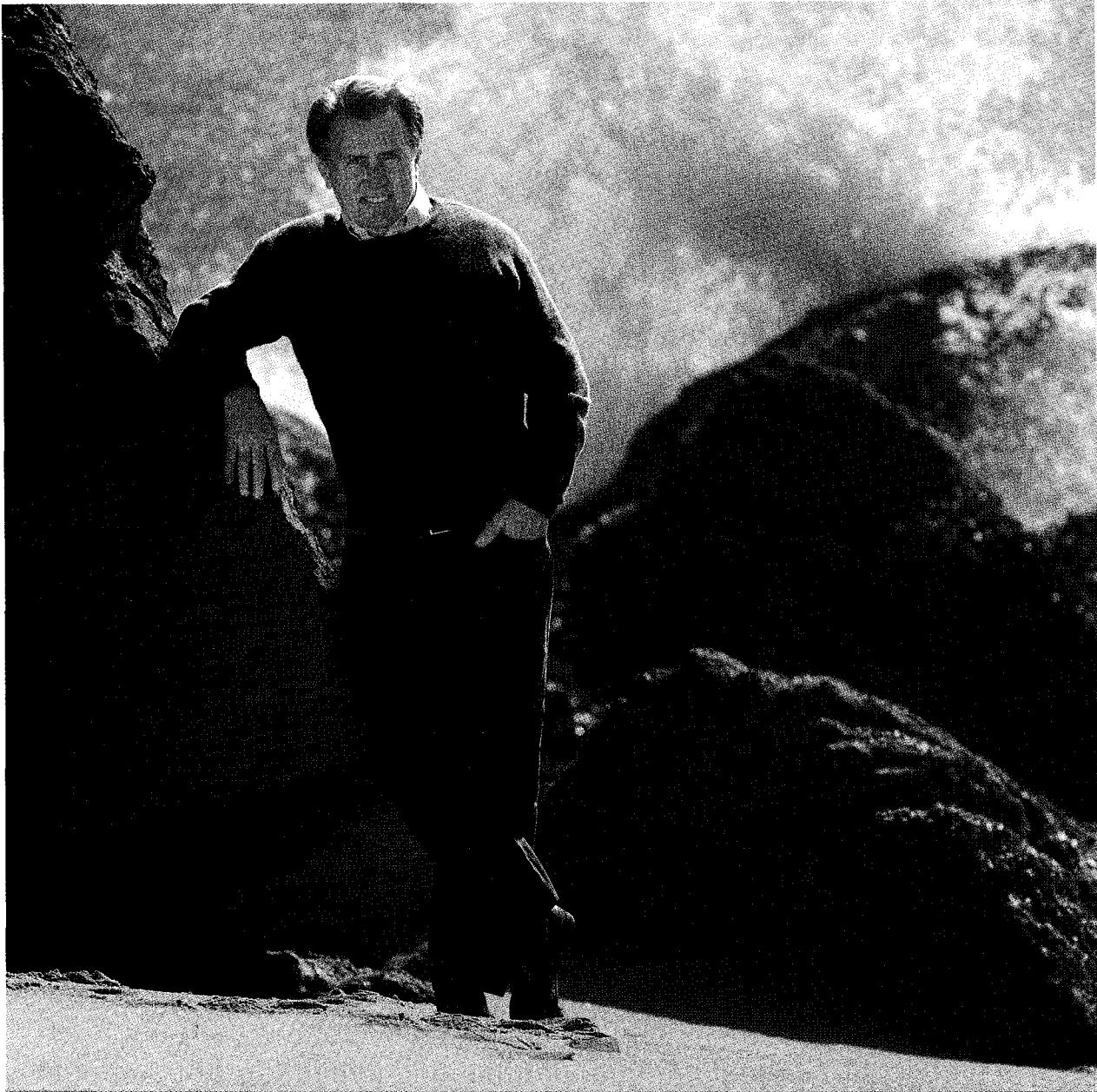
The choreographer Kate Gyllenhaal and her five-member company present the title work and two other premières. (Dixon Place at Vineyard 26, at 39 E. 26th St. 532-1546. May 31 at 8.)

**NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS****VISION FESTIVAL**

The festival continues with its rainbow presentation of avant-jazz artists. This week's highlights include the following. May 30: A solo performance by Malachi Favors, the bassist with the Art Ensemble of Chicago. May 31: A powerhouse meeting with the Chicago tenor mainstay Fred Anderson, the drummer Hamid Drake, and the bassist William Parker. June 1: Jemeel Moondoc's aptly named Jus Grew Orchestra, which makes a virtue out of sprawl. (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 219-3055. For more information, visit www.visionfestival.org. Through June 8.)



Robert Plant, on his first solo tour of the States in eight years, comes to Roseland.



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JAZZ COMPOSERS COLLECTIVE

A comfortable spot with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra hasn't dulled the visionary edge of the saxophonist Ted Nash. His own music, which looks backward, forward, and around all manner of shadowy corners, is decked out in unexpected and fascinating instrumental colors. Ethan Iversen, who rounds out this double bill with his trio, also has a cushy regular gig: he's the pianist for Mark Morris's dance company. His overlooked trio recordings are some of the most arresting yet strangely listener-friendly piano showcases in some time. (New School, 55 W. 13th St. For more information, call 995-1552. May 31 at 8.)

ROBERT PLANT

Still something of a mystery after almost twenty years as a solo artist, Plant recently toured Europe with a cover band, comprised of old school buddies, called Priory of Brion. For this tour, his first Stateside solo appearance in eight years, Plant has assembled a backing band called Strange Sensation, and the word is that the set list is full of Plant originals and covers of blues and pop tunes from the sixties, along with the odd Zep tune. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. June 1 at 8.)

"DUETS ON THE HUDSON"

Old-school saxophone virtuosity meets new-school athleticism when Joe Temperley, a former Mercer Ellington band member and now the baritone anchor for the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and James Carter, the younger multi-tasking reeds player, participate in a series of duets, each with his own pianist. Farid Barron, another L.C.J.O. member, is Temperley's keyboard man; Craig Taborn spots Carter. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, 165 W. 65th St. 721-6500. June 1-2 at 8.)

'NSYNC

Perhaps galvanized by rumors of the impending demise of their rival doppelgängers, the Backstreet Boys, this Orlando-based quintet graduates to the major leagues with a headlining run at a venue normally reserved for rock royalty. Can vacuous, prefabricated teen pop bereft of any substantial musical merit really fill up seventy-nine thousand seats? Just ask your little sister. (Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. June 3-5 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

Musician and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOTTOM LINE

15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—June 1: David Johansen and the Harry Smiths. The man who also goes by the name Buster Poindexter—and who once led the New York Dolls—tries on another hat with his latest project, a folk-music band that gets its name from the collector who put together the seminal "Anthology of American Folk Music" back in 1952.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—May 30: One would think that a former penal colony would provide great genetic material for rock-and-roll musicians, but the best Australia can offer these days is Powderfinger, an enormously popular, if completely inoffensive and overwhelmingly earnest, guitar-driven quintet. May 31: The incendiary bluesman Buddy Guy turns sixty-five two months from this appearance, but don't worry about his retiring. He's just released a new album, "Sweet Tea." Its opening track is a hushed and lonely testament to aging, but the rest of it is fiercely rebellious against the passage of time. June 1-3: The Mighty Mighty Bosstones. Undaunted by the apparent demise of the nineties neo-ska boom, Boston's favorite party band continues to perform in all of its glorious horn-honking clamor. Dicky Barrett, the Bosstones' charismatic, leather-larynxed rogue of a front man, is a master of sheer showmanship. June 5: Stabbing Westward. This band of also-rans from the alternative-rock boom of the past decade made a small name for itself mining the ground broken by such British post-punks as the Cure and Killing Joke. Yet Stabbing Westward

TABLES FOR TWO



DANIEL

60 E. 65th St. (288-0033)—Over the years, New York's grandest restaurants have tended to be chilly temples of haute anxiety where you are made to worry about whether you're good enough to be seated up front rather than exiled to backroom Siberia. At the moment, there is no grander restaurant in town than Daniel Boulud's citadel of luxe, and yet, from the moment you walk in, you're made to feel nothing but warmth. There are greeters galore in the handsome, inviting foyer, but their murmuring good manners conceal nothing but a very pleasant welcome. There is no sense that you're being asked to cool your heels when one of them suggests that you wait a moment in the harlequin-colored bar area, with its Starckian velvet perches and beautifully presented cocktails. And when you are led into the extravagant dining room—a lobby-turned-seraglio with rosy lighting, great swags of striped silk, and a wall of flowers that would make Jeff Koons swoon—you may feel like settling in for the night. Daniel's considerable achievement is to have made Old World swank seem fresh and intimate.

A similar paradox defines the food: luxurious, sometimes surprising combinations, which, when all is said and done, seem simple. Right now the kitchen is besotted by spring, and it's turning out such exquisite bouquets as cold carrot soup with shrimp, sharpened by lime, cumin, and a light coriander cream; and nine-herb ravioli with spring peas, morel cream, and toasted shallots. Main courses dig deeper into the seasonal bounty: a paupiette of sea bass wrapped in a crunchy potato shell and served with leeks and a gutsy Syrah sauce; a risotto of asparagus and lobster, finished with creamy chanterelles; a monumental homage to spring lamb, the rack crusted with olive, lemon, tomato, and pine nuts, the shoulder stuffed with Swiss chard, alongside eggplant, fava beans, and polenta scented with rosemary and scallions. The desert selection offers variations on two themes: fruit of every variety combined in soups, sorbets, cakes, or tatin; and chocolate, which attains dangerous heights in a mille-feuille with black-peppermint semi-freddo and champagne gelée. But even when M. Boulud's food reaches for never-never land, it remains firmly grounded. He is, after all, not from Paris but from Lyons, the ancient heart of French gastronomy, where deep comfort takes precedence over passing chic. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner, Mondays for dinner only. Closed Sundays. Prix fixe, \$78.)

—Charles Michener

lacked the originality and timing of those innovative bands. Now that the word "alternative" no longer passes in any sincerity across the lips of any major-label executives, underground credibility may, belatedly, come calling. Or not. Judge for yourself.

BROWNIES

169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—May 31: Champale, the unusually flexible and inventive septet led by the singer and guitarist Mark Rozzo, stops by with songs from its debut album, "Simple Days." With Shelby, a downtown New York City power trio featuring Kenny Cummings on guitar and vocals, and Folksongs for the Afterlife, an outfit that successfully mixes up old-time folk music with languorous electronic beats. June 5: Reeves Gabrels, a guitarist who rose to prominence with David Bowie's Tin Machine band.

THE COOLER

416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—June 1-2: Aptly ringing the death knell of this avant-garde/indie-music club, which is closing its doors for good, the legendary New York punk duo Suicide bring their synthesized

havoc to full fruition. As unsettling as the group's name would suggest, the ever-confrontational vocalist Alan Vega will provide the raw angst while the stoic and static keyboardist Martin Rev supplies the tinnitus-inducing electronic scree. Prepare for an emotional bruising. With Michael Karoli, of the seminal German band Can, and such downtown hepcats as Botanica and DJ Olive.

MAXWELL'S

1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—June 1: Lil' Band o' Gold, from Lafayette, Louisiana, lives up to its name by bringing together the regional crooner Warren Storm, the accordionist Steve Riley, and the blues guitarist C. C. Adock, as well as a killer horn section.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND

130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—June 1: The increasingly elegant but still soulful swamp rock of the vocalist and pianist Marcia Ball. June 5-7: Patti Smith carries on her never-ending comeback (after recusing herself for a multi-year spell as a wife and mother) with a stop at a fittingly intimate West Village venue not far from the old haunts of her heroes Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg. Now enjoying a second round in the limelight, Smith may lack the bohemian insouciance of her seventies heyday, but she has lost none of her fire.

WETLANDS

161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—May 31: Antibalas is a multiracial Afro-beat ensemble from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which takes its musical and political inspiration from Fela Kuti. Its shows are a thunderous mass of rhythms, horns, and bass. June 2: A pioneering architect of surf music in the sixties, the Southern California guitar legend Dick Dale got a huge career boost thanks to the inclusion of his signature classic, "Misirlou," in Quentin Tarantino's 1994 film "Pulp Fiction." When Dale's noodling riffs were paired with sharp-dressed killers instead of killer waves, his music widened his audience beyond bleached-blond surf purists.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through June 26: The vocalist Andrea Marcovicci is at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—May 31-June 2: The guitar desperado James (Blood) Ulmer hasn't gone soft on us just because he's backed by a seemingly conventional piano trio. The New Art Quartet is actually comprised of such staunch individualists as the pianist John Hicks, the bassist Reggie Workman, and the drummer Rashied Ali, players who, like Ulmer, smile as they scurry about the unmarked terrain where free jazz meets deep blues. Dining.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—She may call France her home, but the American-born singer Dee Dee Bridgewater (here through June 3) is fondly remembered for her seventies stint with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis big band and her subsequent Broadway turn in "The Wiz." She's since released a series of attention-grabbing albums, including tributes to Horace Silver and Ella Fitzgerald, and made some startling visits that have reminded fans of vocal jazz what they've been missing.

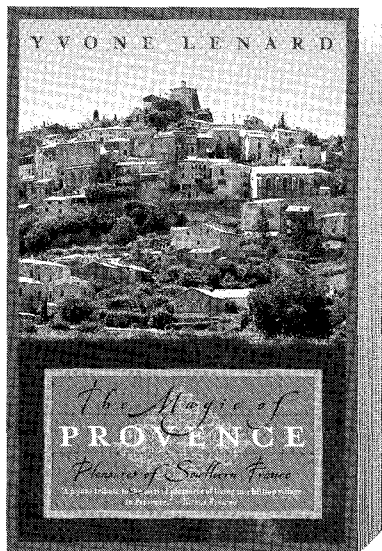
BOTTOM LINE

15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—May 30-31: Best known for his longtime associations with British prog-rock bands like Yes and King Crimson, Bill Bruford has always been a closet jazzman. His Earthworks unit finds the technically accomplished drummer in settings that may come as a surprise to anyone familiar with, say, "Siberian Khatru," from the 1972 Yes album, "Close to the Edge."

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through June 23, the magisterially puckish Bobby Short. ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, Barbara Carroll is in attendance at the piano through June 23.

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—Dominique Lapierre

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IRIDIUM

48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through June 3: Meat-and-potatoes hard bop from a band that holds old ways sacred. One for All's leader is the tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, a player whose spacious tone and inexhaustible energy have made him an omnipresent New York utility man in the short time since he relocated from Chicago. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul.

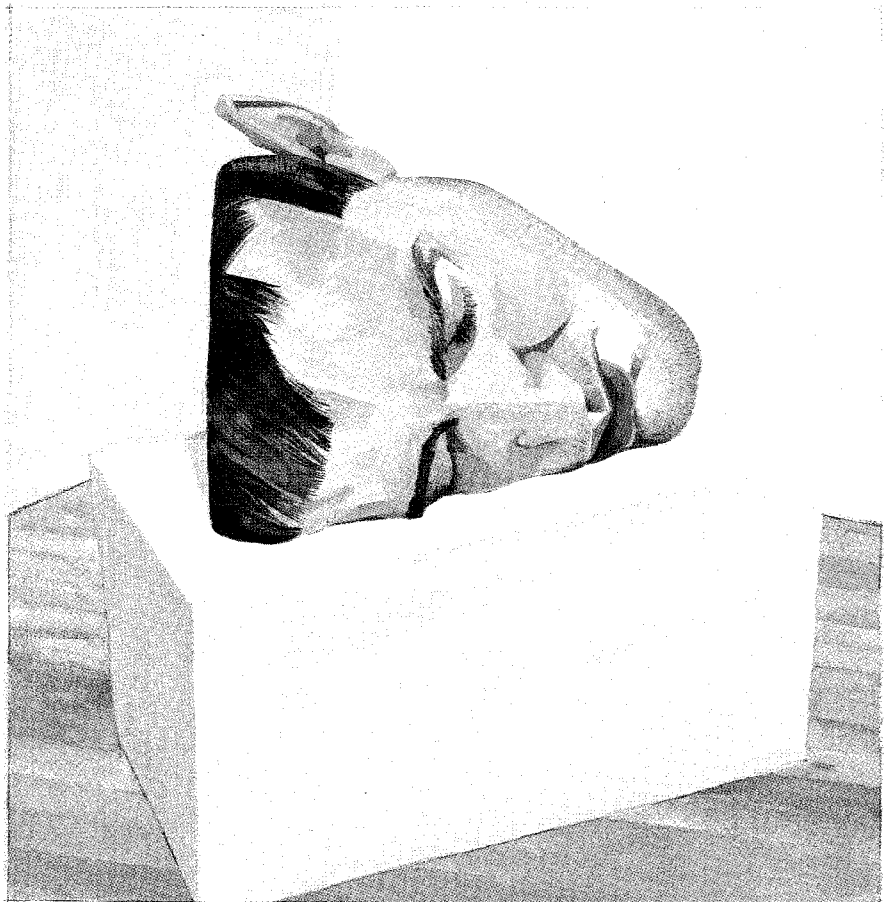
JAZZ GALLERY

290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (242-1063)—May 30: The Yosuke Yamashita Big Band. Despite his presence on the club scene for the better chunk of the nineties, name recognition still eludes the pianist Yamashita. His promising big band, though,

tional first-generation musicians who split the difference between downtown music and new jazz—the drummer Bobby Previte, the keyboardist Wayne Horvitz, the trombonist Ray Anderson, and the saxophonist Marty Ehrlich—hook up with a sixties-era innovator, the electric bassist Steve Swallow, to debut a quintet that's overflowing with potential.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through June 3: In the decade in which the peripatetic Joe Lovano has headlined this venerable club he may never have led the same ensemble twice. This time around, the expert saxophonist brings in his Flights of Fancy band, and shares the stage with another superior winds player, Billy Drewes,



"Mask II," a sculpture by Ron Mueck, at the James Cohan gallery.

features players with considerably more identifiable clout, including Craig Harris, Cecil McBee, Ray Anderson, and Tony Malaby.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—June 3: The Howard Fishman quartet. Led by the guitarist and singer Fishman, a Connecticut native who spent his musically formative years in New Orleans, this quartet has played such diverse locales as the Oak Room, Sardi's, and Pete's Candy Store, a neighborhood bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (where it has had a long-running regular Thursday-night engagement). With such an eclectic résumé, it comes as no surprise that Fishman defies easy characterization. He and his violinist, Russell Farhang, call to mind Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli, and the group, which is rounded out by a bassist and a trumpeter, produces the freshest small-group swing in the city. But their music is much more complex. The band's latest CD, "I Like You a Lot," is an affecting and haunting collection of cunning originals which shows flashes of folk, blues, and even tango. Taking a break from the back room at Pete's, the band settles in for a month of Sundays here.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—June 3: The Bump Band. Four excep-

an old big-band pal who's recently reentered Lovano's ever-evolving musical universe. The not quite double quartet also features the steel-fingered bassist Cameron Brown and two world-class drummers: Idris Muhammad and Joey Baron. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—With a consort of star-struck press and film clips and more than eighty original outfits, "Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years" reminds viewers of the sensuous, almost brash propriety of the "Jackie look." The essentials are familiar: big buttons, solid colors, carefully chosen fabrics (breathtaking pink-and-white raffia lace for a dinner in Paris; spartan black Alaskine for an audience with the Pope). But their minimalist glamour remains bewitching, and it's moving to see, in the First Lady's handwritten letters to Oleg Cassini and other collaborators, her combination of meticulous planning and self-mockery. "Dear Marta," a letter to a Bergdorf's saleswoman

RICCARDO VECCHIO

begins, "Here goes—an order for a million hats." Through July 29. ♦ **"William Blake"** includes more than a hundred and seventy-five works by the British painter, printmaker, and poet. Through June 24. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—For **"About Face,"** Wendy Weitman, a curator in the museum's print department, has cleverly juxtaposed two categories of portraits. Images of actual, identifiable people on the left stare at iconic or imaginary ones on the right. It's an appealing, simple premise, pitting likeness against type, perception against projection. And yet, despite a star-studded roster of thirty-some artists which includes Lautrec, Picasso, Dix, Beckmann, Warhol, and Close, the show bogs down in a welter of casual or mediocre examples. Do we need to see six variations of the same lackluster Dubuffet potato head? In the end, the show feels more like a peek into the museum's storage hoard than an idea-driven ensemble. Through June 5. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—At Frank Gehry's first retrospective at the Whitney, in 1986, undulant titanium roofs and wriggling walls were nowhere in sight. The Los Angeles-based architect seemed a quirky regional figure, fond of unorthodox materials (cardboard, chain-link fencing) and given to chopping projects into multiple room-sized buildings. Nobody could have predicted that he would soon be the world's most hyped and beloved architect. This new, profoundly exhilarating show tracks Gehry's path to Bilbao, and offers working models of current projects in Scotland, Germany, Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. It's too much to absorb in a single visit, but even a quick walk-through will leave visitors delighted, buoyed, amazed—and a little nostalgic for the plumb-line architecture that Gehry's fluid, crumpling planes seem poised to supplant. Through Aug. 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"BitStreams,"** the museum's survey of digitally enhanced art work, features photographs, videos, digitally designed sculptures, and a generous sampling of sound works. Through June 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—**"El Greco: Themes and Variations."** There are seven El Grecos at the Frick, but only two images: three copies of "St. Jerome" in cardinal's robes and four variations on "The Purification of the Temple." Comparison shopping makes it clear why Domenikos Theotokopoulos was the favorite Old Master of the Impressionists. The passionate, chaotic scenes of the expulsion of the money changers and grocers—more than one of which includes birds and rabbits brought live to market and broken eggs spilled in the foreground—are almost antic in composition and garishly loose in brushwork. Through July 29. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

JAPAN SOCIETY

333 E. 47th St. (832-1155)—**"Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art of Japan: The Architect's Other Passion."** On a visit to Tokyo in 1917, Wright observed that "prints choose whom they love and there is no salvation but surrender." This handsomely designed exhibition unites the architect with his alter ego, the print collector, who amassed more than six thousand Japanese woodcuts over the course of his life. A selection of architectural drawings and a plaster model of Tokyo's Imperial Hotel are on view alongside a stellar collection of ukiyo-e prints, notably a series of Kabuki portraits by Shunsho and another of courtesans by Utamaro. The influence on Wright's work is most strongly visible in his drawing of the Thomas Hardy house, in Racine, Wisconsin: in the foreground is a single cherry-blossom branch, a formal device straight out of Hiroshige. Through July 15. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—**"Marc Chagall: Early Works from Russian Collections,"** devoted to the years prior to the artist's permanent emigration from Russia, in 1922, is something of a bumpy ride until its dazzling finale. It opens with a selection of workmanlike canvases by Chagall's first teacher, Yehuda Pen, who legitimized the theme of Jewish life as a subject for his pupil. More than fifty paintings and drawings by Chagall, all borrowed from Russian institutions, offer moments of reverie (a pair of lovers aloft over a grisaille village) and angst (war-weary soldiers tersely rendered in pen and ink). But the group of seven murals commissioned by a theatre in Moscow (one sports the artist's emblematic and ever-popular fiddler on the roof) steals the show. Through Oct. 14. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Brooklyn galleries are open Fridays through Sundays.

FERNANDO BOTERO

"Monumental Sculptures" is an almost tautological title for a Botero exhibition: these ceiling-high nudes and horses seem to have expanded to their natural, elephantine proportions. Sure, Botero's buttocky rondure may be a little relentless (and the horses here do bear an odd resemblance to Barney), but the spectacle of his serene confidence remains insidiously cheering. Through June 9. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900.)

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

The sly French-American sculptor has been the art world's favorite provocateur for the last couple of decades—so much so that it's easy to forget how good she is. This beautiful show offers a reminder in the form of nineteen slender "Personnages," carved in wood almost fifty years ago and cast in bronze more recently. They're comical, and endlessly evocative—some look like giant Cycladic toothbrushes, others like diced baguettes or Surrealist newel posts—and they have the macabre inventiveness of the great tribal art that apparently inspired them. Through June 9. (C&M, 45 E. 78th St. 861-0020.)

RON MUECK

The celebrated author of "Dead Dad" offers two new examples of skewed, tender verisimilitude. One of them, a giant face resting sideways on a pedestal, is an update on "Mask," the baleful emblem of the "Sensation" show. The second represents a glistening newborn baby, its umbilical cord as yet unsnipped, lying atop its exhausted mother's stomach. Both are fastidiously lifelike, down to the last nostril hair and labial wrinkle. But Mueck is no Duane Hanson: persistent distortions of scale give his figures a decided, and slightly comic, uncanniness. Through June 16. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

Short List

BERNARD CHAET

David Findlay, 41 E. 57th St. 486-7660. Through June 2.

INKA ESSENHIGH

Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through June 23.

WAYNE THIEBAUD

Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-4997. Through July 12.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

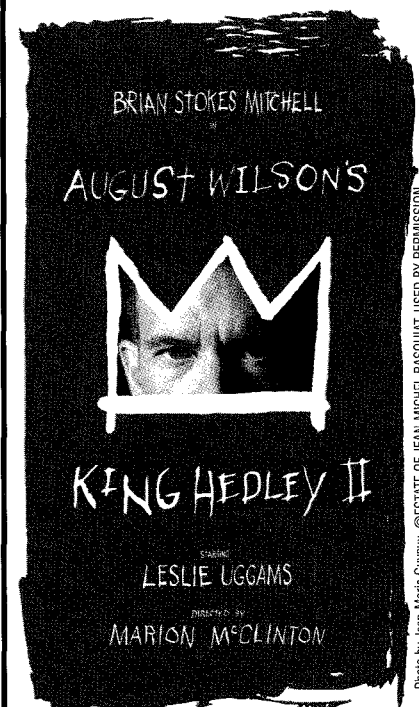
VERNE DAWSON

Imagine the Hudson River School crossed with a pacific rendition of the "Battle of Issus," by Albrecht Altdorfer, the sixteenth-century Cecil B. De Mille. Dawson's large-scale paintings on Arcadian themes are set in a pre-industrial, pan-racial

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BRENDA GOODMAN

In recent shows this abstract painter has been inching closer and closer to figuration: here she steps back and sheds, in the process, an incipient sentimentality that worried her admirers. The new paintings are powerfully blunt: big boulders or luggage shapes pile up into tottering walls, broken by ravines of chinky light. Occasionally, odd cords or tassels hang down from clifflike heights. Goodman's world remains as sombre as ever, but its evocative power feels broom-clean, stark, resurgent. Through June 9. (Howard Scott, 529 W. 20th St. 646-486-7004.)

GLENN LIGON

Ligon continues his double-barrelled approach to making art, a marriage of racial politics and post-Pop painting. But viewers expecting his trademark black-and-white appropriated-text paintings are in for a big surprise. His new work depicts line drawings found in seventies African-American coloring books, silk-screened onto primed canvas, then scribbled over with Crayola-colored marks, so that Malcolm X has red clown cheeks and a bright-pink mouth, while Harriet Tubman radiates a rainbow of concentric halos. If this sounds like child's play, it's because the compositions were created in collaboration with primary schoolers. This deceptively simple show finds Ligon as subversively eloquent as ever. Through June 9. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.)

SHIRIN NESHAT

Islam serves as the backdrop for three oracular video installations by an artist with a flair for melodrama. The most powerful, "Possessed," reads as an allegory for an artist's life: a gaudily dressed, wild-eyed woman with hair to match wanders around a town square, climbs up on a stage, whips the more conservatively attired citizens into a frenzy, and then wanders off unnoticed in the melee. The most ambitious film, "Passage," is overblown, with a Philip Glass score that could pass for John Williams, but it contains one unforgettable image—a circle of chador-shrouded women digging a hole in a synchronized frenzy so intense you may crave a Xanax. Through June 29. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

TONY OURSLER

Amityville has nothing on Metro Pictures this month, as Oursler's phantasmagoric video sculptures fill the gallery like a swarm of poltergeists. The spectral objects fall into two categories: earth-bound (glass pods encasing projected faces) and airborne (TV antennas, wire screens, and DayGlo Plexiglas fragmenting projections that hover near the ceiling). The soundtracks of each piece—which include phrases like "creeping, creeping, creeping" or "divinely inspired, blow your mind"—merge to form a single, menacing murmur. Through June 16. (519 W. 24th St. 206-7100.)

Short List

RICHMOND BURTON

Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through June 30.

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES

Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Through June 9.

MORGAN TAYLOR

Blue Mountain, 530 W. 25th St. 646-586-4730. Through June 2.

CHRISTOPHER WOOL

Luhning Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100. Through June 16.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

RAOUL DE KEYSER

This Belgian painter, now in his eighth decade, paints modest, sotto-voce abstractions: a few pools or freehand dashes, a constellation of paper-clip

shapes. They're the kind of thing one associates with a tired, endgame view of painting, but a few blaze up with arresting delicacy. In one especially fine picture, eleven green pebbly shapes lie scattered, not quite haphazardly, around a field of salmon pink. At the top edge a single reddish ellipse, like a squashed sun, gives the arrangement the tiniest nudge toward representation. Through June 16. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

BRAD KAHLHAMER

This Native American artist dares us to say that he paints like a drunken Indian. At a glance, his lurching Southwestern landscapes, overlaid with scrawled phrases and images, look like identity shtick. But Kahlhamer's iconography, especially in these latest canvases and drawings, is ever more inventive and genuine, and the strange, fierce landscape they invoke, with its pigtailed bald eagles, towers of amplifiers, and viral invasions of smiley faces, feels at once unfamiliar and reckless. Through June 30. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

Short List

JEFFREY VALLANCE

Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through June 16.

HIRO YAMAGATA

Ace, 275 Hudson St. 235-5554. Through July 28.

AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S

May 31 at 7: Session I of a sale of Latin-American art. While the session is clearly dominated by Frida Kahlo's serene and sensual "Portrait of Cristina, My Sister" (from 1928, estimated to sell for approximately a million dollars), there are also fine works by such artists as Wilfredo Lam, Remedios Varo, Fernando Botero ("Female Torso," a massive bronze sculpture in his signature style), and the Chilean Surrealist Matta. ♦ June 1 at 10:15 A.M.: Session II of the sale, which includes works by Diego Rivera and other modern artists, several religious paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a number of Romantic and post-Impressionist landscapes. ♦ June 4 at 10:15 A.M.: A wide range of contemporary furniture, sculpture, and decorative works of art. The Shaker-influenced wooden furniture of George Nakashima (1905-90) is abundantly represented; some of the less sedate items are a pair of Frank Gehry corrugated-paper-and-Masonite "Wiggle" chairs and "Four Years Before Lunch: Grandson in Hawaiian Shirt," a creation in wood, glass, and brass by Wendell Castle. ♦ June 5 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Twentieth-century silver, furniture, and decorative art works, including a broad selection of Mucha advertising posters and Tiffany glass. ♦ June 5 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: The first two sessions of a three-day sale of the library of Marshall B. Coyne, an impressive collection of letters, autographs, and first-edition books by such figures as Tolstoy, Whitman (an autograph manuscript of "O Captain! My Captain!"), Presidents Madison, Harrison, and Lincoln, and the Revolutionary War martyr-spy Nathan Hale. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S

May 30 at 7 and May 31 at 10 A.M.: The house holds its own sale of Latin-American art, featuring work by such artists as Rivera, Tamayo, and Ray Smith. ♦ June 1 at 10 A.M.: Art works celebrating the world of horses and the hunt, including a number of fine paintings by Sir Alfred James Munnings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST

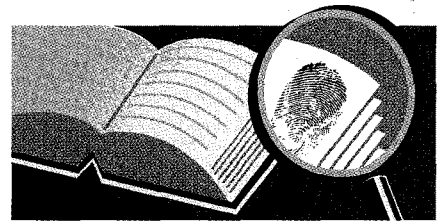
June 4 at 6: An auction of fine wine. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

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BOOK CURRENTS

Fingered



In 1905, in a London courtroom, two brothers were tried for killing a shopkeeper and his wife in nearby Deptford. The prosecution's case relied heavily on a sweaty fingerprint left on the victims' cashbox. As Colin Beavan writes in **FINGERPRINTS** (Hyperion), two issues hung in the balance while the jury deliberated: the fate of the brothers and the future of dactyloscopy, the shaky new science of identifying people by the ridges on their fingers. The jury returned a guilty verdict, and, for the first time, fingerprint evidence sent men to the gallows. The conviction announced a new era in criminal justice, one based more on physical evidence than on eyewitness accounts.

For almost a century, fingerprinting remained one of the most respected tools of forensic science. Only in the early nineties did faith in its reliability begin to erode. In **SUSPECT IDENTITIES** (Harvard), Simon A. Cole recounts how a number of cases involving the New York State Police revealed tampering with fingerprint evidence, as well as the incompetence of many police labs. Enter forensic science's newest talisman—DNA typing.

One of the great advantages of genetic evidence is that it survives much longer than flesh. In places with heavy rainfall, hot summers, and acidic soil, a dead body can be reduced to bone and a few tendons in just weeks. But long after fingerprints have rotted away, experts can still gather bones and hair and use them to shed light on cold cases. In **THE BONE LADY** (Penguin), Mary H. Manhein describes her intrepid career as a forensic anthropologist, which involves trudging into Louisiana swamps, battling clouds of gnats, and helping police to recover half-decayed remains and long-forgotten skeletons. Manhein is candid about what motivates her: "I admit it," she writes. "I am fascinated with death."

—William Cohen

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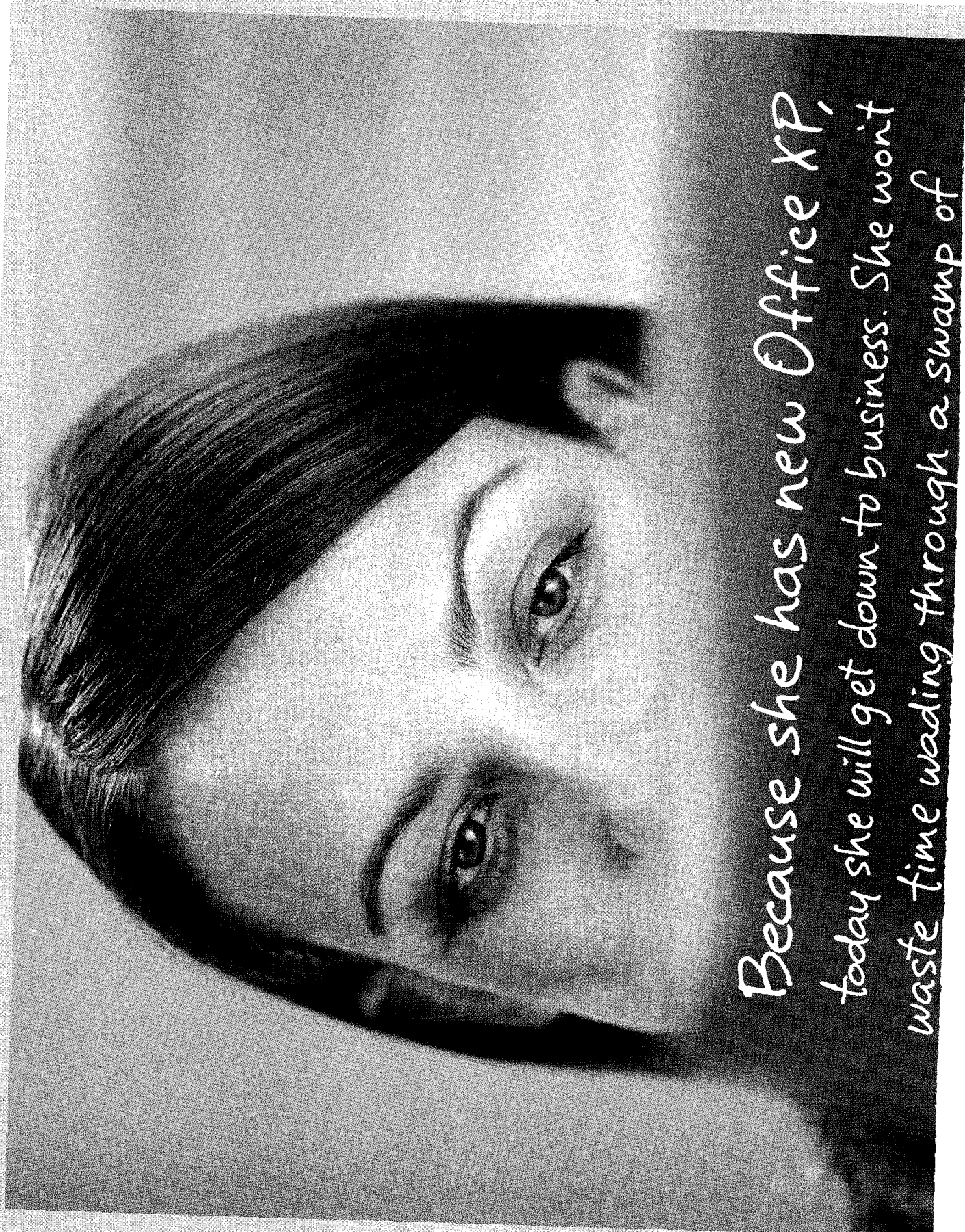
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ings from a wide range of international dealers. A series of lectures (including a talk on fabric art by Arthur C. Danto), given in the armory's Tiffany Room, is being held in tandem with the exhibition. (Park Ave. at 66th St. 800-563-7632. May 31-June 4.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

WILLIAM KLEIN

In 1954, the painter, photographer, and filmmaker returned from Paris to his native New York, a homecoming that led to the book "Life Is Good and Good for You in New York: Trance Witness Revels." Though he was photographing in the streets at the same time that Robert Frank was working on "The Americans," Klein's approach was a more gregarious, full-frontal assault. These large vintage prints are ripe with the faces of kids and swells, mugging and unself-conscious, filling the picture plane. Klein uses slow shutter speeds and creates grainy effects, rendering his subjects in energetic, graphic black-and-white compositions. His New York series is followed by similar treatments of Rome (1956), Moscow (1961), and Tokyo (1962). Through June 9. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

ANDRES SERRANO

The ex-enfant terrible is back with a new cache of—no great shock here—politically charged images of mythic and symbolic figures spiked with social taboo. Titles like "Black Santa" and "The Death of Superman" make sure that these glossy cibachrome murals—which have none of the nuance and luminosity of "Piss Christ," his trademark 1987 photograph of a crucifix in urine—read as sophomoric one-liners. The most lurid of them, a literal "Vagina Dentata," is especially ham-fisted in its effort to court controversy. Through June 8. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Mary Ellen Mark glories in a mix of poverty and pageantry which might once have been called vulgar. She has been to a lot of baby beauty contests, twins' conventions, and rodeos, and she has spent years following families who lay their lives out for her camera. Her combination of a soft heart and a sharp eye is particularly vivid in a string of double portraits dotted around the exhibit, including "Etta James and Strappy," the singer being licked by a tiny dog; "Father and Daughter, Aryan Nations, Hayden Lake, Idaho," a neo-Nazi with an infant in his arms; and "Husband and Wife, Harlan County, Kentucky," a gnarled gentleman offhandedly levelling a pistol at his young wife's temple. This will be the last show in the Uptown galleries, which close with it on June 17. ♦ Kiki Smith's "Telling Tales" parses fairy stories and childhood myths via photography, sculpture, and video. Hans Bellmer's oddly assembled dolls and a collection of Victorian daguerreotype portraits of male friends—some of whom look to modern eyes like couples—are also on show. All shows at the Center's Midtown space through June 10. (Uptown: 1130 Fifth Ave., at 93rd St. Midtown: 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

TRACEY BARAN

Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225. Through June 9.

JAMES CASEBERE

Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 239-1181. Through June 16.

ALFRED EISENSTAEDT

292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through June 9.

NADAV KANDER

Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through June 23.

ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW / KETAKI

SHETH / PAMELA SINGH

Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444. Through June 16.

LUIS GONZALEZ PALMA

Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600. Through June 30.

KATHERINE TURCZAN

Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370. Through June 30.

"INHABITING"

Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through June 16.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.



Fazil Say performs Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" with the New York Philharmonic, beginning May 31.

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

AMATO OPERA

Verdi's "Falstaff" may not be a chamber opera per se, yet its nimble incorporation of elements from Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor" and from "Henry IV" (by the composer-littérateur Arrigo Boito), along with the heightened verbal play that comedy naturally allows, has inspired a number of intimate productions. In Amato's final presentation of the season, the little company's artistic director, Anthony Amato, has created a version designed to bring out the "hidden" arias, duets, and ensembles in the work's quasi-Wagnerian musical fabric by leaving them in the original Italian, with the rest of the opera's text sung in English. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery. 228-8200. June 2 at 7:30 and June 3 at 2:30. Through June 17.)

"THE DIARY OF ONE WHO VANISHED"

It was in the summer of 1917 that the Czech composer Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) first met Kamila Stösslová, the comely twenty-six-year-old wife of an antique dealer. While the relationship was never consummated, it inspired a host of daring masterpieces that would grace the final years of Janáček's life; its first fruit was "The Diary of One Who Vanished," begun within days of the meeting. A cycle of twenty-two songs for alto and tenor soloists, women's chorus, and piano, it is a richly imagined fantasy of a young farmer who runs away with a dark and mysterious Gypsy girl—just the thing for a freshly impassioned sexagenarian. In 1999, the director Deborah Warner realized Janáček's dream of staging the work, in a production by the English National Opera for which Seamus Heaney provided an English translation of the original Czech. Lincoln Center presents the American premiere of the production, with the singers Ruby Philogene and Ian Bostridge repeating their London roles; Julius Drake is the pianist. (John Jay Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 721-6500. May 31 and June 1-2 at 8.)

"WAKING IN NEW YORK"

The premiere production of Elodie Lauten's operatic portrait of Allen Ginsberg, with a libretto based on the writer's poetry. The two-day run closes on what would have been Ginsberg's seventy-fifth birthday. Mark Duer, Sherrita Duran, and Laura Wolfe are the featured singers; Tom O'Horgan directs; and Mimi Stern-Wolfe is the conductor. (14th St. Y Theatre, 344 E. 14th St. 877-3399. June 2 at 8 and June 3 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Kurt Masur's latest program begins with the American premiere of Siegfried Matthus's Concerto for Flute and Harp, a cool, ritualistic work, strongly influenced by the impressionism of Debussy and Ravel, that appeals more to the senses than to the heart. (Robert Langevin and Nancy Allen, the orchestra's principal flute and harp players, are the soloists.) The rest of the program, however, abounds in youthful verve: Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1 and Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," his first symphonic success, with Fazil Say, a charismatic young Turkish pianist who handles the classical and popular genres with equal flair. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. May 31 and June 2 at 8, June 1 at 2, and June 5 at 7:30.)

GAY GOTHAM CHORUS

The Old Testament tale of David and Jonathan, intense but ambiguously described, has often been interpreted as a love story. The chorus, conducted by Jonathan Babcock and assisted by the Cosmopolitan Symphony Orchestra, offers the premiere of a cantata on the subject by Stefan Weisman, part of a program including music by Mozart, Wagner, Thompson, and Brahms (the "Alto Rhapsody," with a star turn by the Metro-

LARA TOWLIN

politan Opera mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. May 30 at 8.)

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS

Birds, lovers, and the humpbacked whale are the subjects for the chorus's last concerts of the season, which present new works by the American composers Kirke Mechem ("Winging Wildly") and Jacob Avshalomov ("His Fluid Aria") along with classics by Brahms (the amorous "Gypsy Songs"), Monteverdi, and Stanford ("The Bluebird," a little gem of English pastoralism). (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 568-5948. May 31 and June 1 at 8.)

KITCHEN HOUSE BLEND

The ten-piece jazz/new-music orchestra offers another evening of three premières by three on-the-edge composers: the jazz masters Bluiett and Charles Gayle and the Japanese-American noise-music composer Kato Hideki. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793, ext. 11. May 31 and June 1-2 at 8.)

RECITALS

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER BAND: "BACH JUXTAPOSED"

Elaine Comparone, the harpsichordist at the head of this vocal and instrumental ensemble, presents a program combining selections from the master's "Art of Fugue" with new works by Robert Baksa, William Mayer (a commission in honor of his seventy-fifth birthday), and others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 30 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC: MUSIC BY FRITZ KREISLER

The violinist Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) was one of the great charmers of classical music. Not only did he play with a spacious tone and an effortlessly graceful style (he rarely practiced), but he composed a substantial body of light classical works for his instrument—many of which were written under the names of minor composers long dead. (When Kreisler announced in 1935 that the enterprise was a hoax, a number of prominent music critics were not amused.) Bargemusic completes its two-week mini-festival of his music with two programs coordinated by the violist Paul Neubauer. May 31 and June 1 at 8: Kreisler's "Marche Miniature Viennoise" and his arrangement of Tartini's Fugue for Violin and Cello share the program with works by Britten (the enigmatic Suite No. 3 for Solo Cello) and Mozart (the Clarinet Quintet, featuring the clarinetist Anthony McGill). ♦ June 2 at 7:30 and June 3 at 4: Kreisler arrangements of pieces by Beethoven, Corelli, and Pergolesi—and various other Kreisler bonbons, yet to be announced—are balanced out by Brahms's weighty Piano Quintet in F Minor (with the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott). (Fulton Ferry Landing, 718-624-2083.)

GLASS FARM CONCERTS

Music by Ligeti (the quirky "Six Bagatelles") and Andriessen ("Worker's Union," an aggressively dissonant "symphonic work for any loud-sounding group of instruments") dominates this ensemble program, which features the saxophonist Iaimur Sullivan and the percussionist Matthew Gold. (Glass Farm Concert Loft, 438 W. 37th St. 244-6422. June 2 at 8.)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE:

"CROSS-TOWN NEW YORK"

During the Cold War, New York's new-music world split into two camps: a band of fiercely intellectual composers gathered at Columbia University, while a freewheeling antiestablishment scene flourished south of Washington Square. This concert tries to reconcile all of New York's geographical factions, featuring works by Julia Wolfe (rebelliously downtown), Mario Davidovsky (unrepentantly uptown), Elizabeth Brown (whose "Blue Minor" is written in a pastoral, out-of-town idiom), and Tan Dun (whose music combines influences from Chinese drama, Hollywood film scores, and the European avant-garde). (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. 594-6100. June 2 at 2.)

RINAT SHAHAM

In a concert sponsored by the Marilyn Horne Foundation, the young Israeli mezzo-soprano performs music by Poulenc ("Calligrammes"), Ravel, Schubert, and Gershwin. The pianist is David Moody. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. June 3 at 3.)

CHITOSE OKASHIRO

The young pianist offers music by modern Estonian composers (Heino Eller and Eduard Tubin) along with virtuoso transcriptions of excerpts from Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony and Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" and "The Ring." (ProPiano Hall, 85 Jane St. 206-8794. June 3 at 4.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS

Da Capo has undergone a few personnel changes in the past thirty years, but it has remained true to its mission of performing a wide range of contemporary music with equal dedication and skill. For its gala anniversary concert, the group continues its advocacy of freshly discovered works (by Alla Borzova, Giya Kancheli, and Bruce Adolph) while reviving pieces from its past (including "Petroushskates," an amiably ice-bound tribute to Stravinsky by Joan Tower, the group's founding pianist). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. June 5 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND OUT IN THE COUNTRY

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

The growing popularity of organic foods has confused the meaning of the word "organic"; indeed, the conglomerate General Mills now owns many of the producers of those once obscure pesticide-free products that have suddenly migrated from health-food-store shelves to supermarket freezers. In time to help clarify matters, the Alternative Agricultural Approaches—an ad-hoc group of farmers in Rensselaer County (near Troy, New York) which is described by Dottie Cross, one of its founders, as "just five country people"—is sponsoring a free self-guided farm tour. The group, now in its seventh year, was started, according to Cross, to show folks that there's more to farming than cows, dairy farming being the dominant form of agriculture in upstate New York. The five farms on the tour raise such items as organic produce (the Homestead and the Berle Farms), organic catnip (the Dusty Miller Farm), buffalo (the Case Bison Acres), and Nubian dairy goats, which are Cross's specialty and, according to her, are the only goats with long floppy ears and Roman noses. (June 2 from 10 to 5 and June 3 from noon to 5. For more information, call 518-235-7091.)

IN TOWN

READINGS

May 30 at 8: By the poet Seamus Heaney, from his translation of "Beowulf." (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500.) ♦ June 3 at 7: By David Durham, from his novel, "Gabriel's Story," and by Colson Whitehead, from his novel "John Henry Days." (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 4 at 7: By Victoria Bruce, from "No Apparent Danger," her account of the deaths in 1993 of nine scientists on the Galeras volcano, in southern Colombia. (Half King, 505 W. 23rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 4 at 7:30: By Matthew Kneale, from his novel "English Passengers." (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS

May 30 at 6:30: Timon Screech, a professor of Japanese art, discusses Japanese erotic images of the eighteenth century. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 832-1155.) ♦ May 30 at 6:30: The music archivist Chana Mlotek and her son, Zalmen Mlotek, who is also the co-artistic director of the Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre, talk about (and sing) Yiddish show tunes. (Eldridge Street Synagogue, 12 Eldridge St. 978-0803.) ♦ May 31 at 8: Eric Schlosser, the author of "Fast Food Nation," offers his take on the eating habits of harried Americans. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

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MOVIES OPENING

THE ANIMAL

A comedy with Rob Schneider ("Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo") as a man who gains superpowers from transplanted animal parts. Opening June 1.

BREAD AND ROSES

Ken Loach directed this drama about a labor activist (Adrien Brody) fighting to unionize the Mexican janitorial workers of Los Angeles. Opening June 1.

A LOVE DIVIDED

A drama based on the true story of a contentious marriage between a Protestant woman and a Catholic man which became a cause célèbre in nineteenth-century Ireland. Opening June 1.

WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN?

A professional thief (Martin Lawrence) attempts to recover a ring stolen from him by a billionaire tycoon (Danny DeVito) in a comedy directed by Sam Weisman. Opening June 1.

FILM NOTES

AMORES PERROS

The debut directorial effort of Alejandro González Iñárritu gives you a pretty good idea of what life is like in Mexico City and an enduring wish never to drive its streets at rush hour. The first section chronicles the near-incestuous affair between Octavio (Gael García Bernal) and his sister-in-law Susana (Vanessa Bauche). The second, which sags with weary symbolism, is about a model who loses a leg. The third and strongest tells of an ex-terrorist and tramp (Emilio Echevarría). The connective tissue between these folks is a car crash, and each of them also either owns or trains dogs. Iñárritu's style may be heated and hectic, but he doesn't bully you into judging these frazzled figures, and, in Echevarría, he has found a figure of great and grimy nobility. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/2/01.) (Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

BLOW

The story of George Jung, a Massachusetts man who sold the Medellín cartel's cocaine to mainstream America in the seventies, would seem to offer a perfect star vehicle for Johnny Depp, but the unconvincing narrative doesn't allow him to shape a performance. The scenes are flimsily staged—thin and underdone. Now and then the director, Ted Demme, resorts to a rapid montage of shots meant to convey the giddy drug life, but this isn't directing; it's more like flinging a loosely pasted scrapbook onto the floor and asking the audience to sort it out.—*David Denby* (4/9/01) (Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.)

BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY

Helen Fielding's creation has finally arrived on-screen; in place of her wiry, worried tone we now find an almost confident pleasure in mishaps and man-hunting. The director, Sharon Maguire, has shaped the fretful original into a basic romantic comedy, leaving an aching Bridget (Renée Zellweger) with a choice of nice Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth) or dastardly Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant). These three leads are much better than the movie they front; some of the secondary characters are dangerously thin, although Jim Broadbent is as crumpled and reliable as ever in the role of our heroine's dad. Bridget mania, meanwhile, shows no signs of abating, but one hopes that this film might herald the end of the affair; after all, self-pity has its limitations as the engine of drama, and the idea that a young woman might be not just unhappy but somehow incomplete without a man would have struck even Jane Austen as laughably passé.—*A.L.* (4/16/01) (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)



THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

Explicit, eyeglass-fogging sexual games from the director Wayne Wang. A nerdy, rich Silicon Valley computer engineer, Richard (Peter Sarsgaard), pays a beautiful freckle-faced stripper, Florence (Molly Parker), to accompany him to Las Vegas for a three-day weekend. Richard is paying, but he wants feeling and emotion; Florence wants nothing but control. The movie, shot with a hand-held digital camera, has a dreamy surface and the aura of a reverie, but there's also a bit of suspense floating in the erotic cloud: Will Richard get Florence to respond to him? A friend of Florence's named Jerri (Carla Gugino), her opposite in every way, threat-



"Bread and Roses," with Elpidia Carrillo, Pilar Padillo, and Adrien Brody.

ens to take the movie to a dangerous place, but she storms off, leaving the two inarticulate principals to mop up.—*D.D.* (4/23 & 30/01) (Angelika Film Center, Eastside Playhouse, and Empire 25.)

CHOPPER

The tale of a brute and a braggart, all the more daunting for being drawn from life; Mark Brandon Read (Eric Bana), lovingly known as Chopper, was one of the most outlandishly violent—and certainly most famous—prisoners in Australia's jails. Andrew Dominik's movie tracks him from the late nineteen-seventies to the early nineties, watching him make and remake enemies while cleaving ominously to old friends. The film steps up to its neck in blood, yet it's hardly your standard exploitation flick. Chopper may be exploiting the prison system, and the media have fun exploiting his legend, but there is also a strain of comic independence in the man, and the picture ends up as a thoroughly Australian, if discordant, hymn to the peculiar virtues of mateship.—*A.L.* (4/16/01) (Village East Cinemas.)

THE CIRCLE

Anonymous women on the streets of Teheran crouch alongside cars to avoid police, dart down alleys, and flee from dangerous places with black chadors held over their heads, as if flying under dark wings. At first we may be puzzled by the frenetic rushing about, but after a while we realize that this is exactly the point. These women have either spent time in prison or are heading straight there, and they are looking for a place to hide in a society in which single women have no more than provisional legitimacy as citizens. The director, Jafar Panahi, offers echoes of the Italian neorealist cinema in the general forlornness and pained humanism of his approach, but he's created aesthetic strategies all his own. Despite a longeur here and there, the cumulative power of "The Circle" is extraordinary. In Farsi.—*D.D.* (4/23 & 30/01) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DRIVEN

Bring earplugs. Renny Harlin and Sylvester Stallone, the team who gave us the vertical thrills of "Cliffhanger," try to go horizontal with a car-racing movie. It's not a bad popcorn flick as long as Sly and the gang stay in their cars, but when they emerge it gets ugly.—*Michael Agger* (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

A FREE SOUL

This wheezing 1931 melodrama was a sensational success. Adela Rogers St. Johns, the daughter of a lawyer, wrote the story about a brilliant alco-

holic lawyer (Lionel Barrymore) whose independent, "free" daughter (Norma Shearer) has a hot affair with a man whom her father had got acquitted on a murder charge—a racketeer known as Ace (Clark Gable). Shearer's acting is dreadful, but she was in her bold-indiscreet-modern-woman period and looks sexily undressed in her silky Adrian gowns. Gable had erotic menace in his villainous role, and he gives the picture its only charge. Things get pitifully maudlin when high-minded Leslie Howard, Shearer's former fiancé, shoots Gable and is defended by Barrymore, and Barrymore hams fearfully (he got an Academy Award for it). A vintage fraudulently "daring" movie in the glossy-hokey M-G-M style.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; June 4-5.)

FUNNY FACE

Fred Astaire as an Avedonish photographer who discovers Audrey Hepburn working in a bookshop and takes her to Paris to model clothes for a *Vogue*-like magazine. The Givenchy clothes are lovely; the sequences (which Avedon supervised) of Astaire tak-

R. GREGORY CHRISTIE

ing photos are often amusingly, romantically misty; best of all, the George and Ira Gershwin score has some of the fresh sprightliness it must have had when it served the original "Funny Face" on Broadway thirty years before (also with Astaire). Directed by Stanley Donen; originally released in 1957.—P.K. (The Screening Room; June 3-4.)

THE GOLDEN BOWL

Henry James made easy—no small task, given the complications of the plot. Prince Amerigo (Jeremy Northam) marries Maggie Verver (Kate Beckinsale), whose father, Adam Verver (Nick Nolte), then marries Maggie's friend Charlotte Stant (Uma Thurman). No one has a clue what anyone else is up to, let alone what happened before the marriage craze set in. In the book, such innocence seems like one of the infinite velleities of its atmosphere; onscreen, you have half a mind to slap the characters awake. This is a Merchant-Ivory production, so it looks as luscious as ever, though the actors display an unaccustomed shudder of neurosis; the honorable exception is Nick Nolte, who gives a growing depth to his depiction of the self-made man. Not much happens, although it is cunningly camouflaged as excess; why have a boring party, the film suggests, when you can make it a costume party and have people wear suits of armor?—A.L. (5/7/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas and Paris.)

A KNIGHT'S TALE

There's some great medieval action in Brian Hehlend's second film—essentially the story of a commoner (Heath Ledger) who competes for the love of a lady (Shannyn Sossamon). Ledger has golden-boy good looks that make it easy to cheer him on, and the film is given a modern gloss with an insistent rock-anthem score. But hokey dialogue and uninspired situations weigh everything down. It's fun enough, but only joust.—Bruce Diones (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

LADIES THEY TALK ABOUT

The racier elements of this 1933 "women behind bars" movie (made just before the censorious Production Code was enforced) include a cigar-smoking lesbian and a jolly ex-madam who cracks jokes about having run a "beauty parlor." Its one artistic distinction is Barbara Stanwyck's typically robust and varied performance as a beautiful moll who flirts with the idea of going straight. Stanwyck delivers her tough-gal lines with panache while conveying flickering shades of passion or insincerity; she makes an impression, if not a complete character. With Preston S. Foster, Lyle Talbot, and Lillian Roth. Directed by Howard Bretherton and William Keighley.—Michael Sragow (Film Forum; June 1-2.)

THE LUZHIN DEFENCE

After the stream-of-consciousness rigors of Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway," the director Marleen Gorris tackles the endgames and head games of Vladimir Nabokov's chess novel. John Turturro plays the titular Russian prodigy, and he gives his emotionally catatonic character a slouchy, innocent physical charm. As the countess who loves Luzhin, Emily Watson is all eyes and smiles. Together, the two actors combine for a few clever gambits, but it's mostly a muted affair.—M.A. (Beckman, Empire 25, and The Screening Room.)

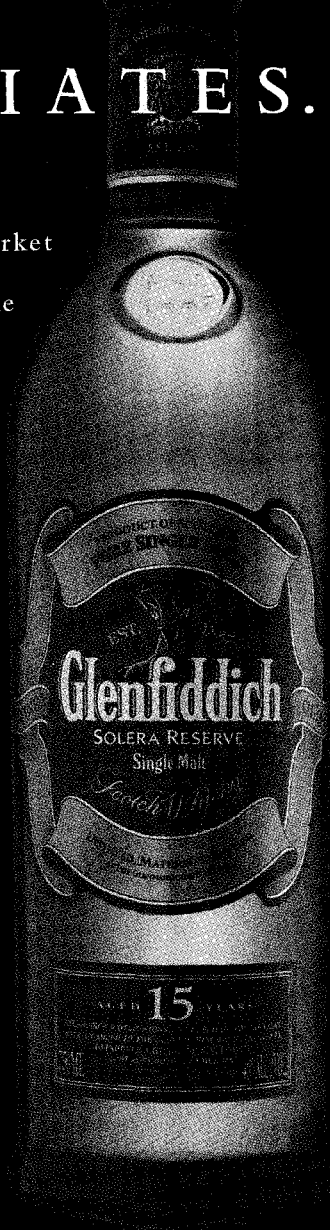
MEMENTO

Guy Pearce plays Leonard, a former insurance investigator who has mislaid his short-term memory; leave the room and come back ten minutes later, and he won't remember you. To help his case, and to solve the apparent murder of his wife, Leonard tattoos himself with memoranda and drives around the lowlier districts of L.A. County. At the same time, he has a couple of acquaintances (Carrie-Anne Moss and Joe Pantoliano) who use his condition for their own unscrupulous ends. There is a fine, despairing comedy to these events—not just in our fidgety hero but in the constant thwarting of our need to know. The young British writer and director Christopher Nolan, who has every intention of putting us through the mill, doubles his fun by running the whole story backward.—A.L. (3/19/01) (Angelika Film Center, Astor Plaza, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park

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16, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Olympia I and II.)

MOROCCO

Marlene Dietrich's first Hollywood film, and perhaps Josef von Sternberg's most effective piece of romantic mythmaking. It's enchantingly silly, full of soulful grand passions, drifting cigarette smoke, and a few too many pictorial shots of the Foreign Legion marching this way and that. Dietrich is Amy Jolly, a mysterious woman with a past she won't talk about, who arrives in Morocco and gets a job singing in a rough café. You feel that she's a real performer here: when she comes out to sing, her energy level soars. For her first number, she appears in top hat, white tie, and tails; a Legionnaire (Gary Cooper) shushes the raucous, jeering crowd. She sings, in a deep, harsh voice, and then, in perhaps the most daring moment in all of her pictures, she eyes a woman at a table, takes a flower from her, kisses the startled woman on the mouth, and, turning, tosses the flower to Cooper. In this 1930 picture she's still the German Dietrich—not the almost abstract, international Dietrich she later became.—*P.K.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; June 3.)

MOULIN ROUGE

A frantically ambitious postmodernist musical in which no single song is performed from beginning to end and no dance number is staged without the dancers' movements being kaleidoscoped into a dozen angles. Set in a stylized and digitalized Paris, the movie offers the Moulin Rouge night club as a seething Belle Époque Studio 54, where a fresh-from-the-provinces poet named Christian (Ewan McGregor) falls in love with Satine (Nicole Kidman), a consumptive cancan dancer and courtesan. The story is no more than a flimsy outline, but it still manages to combine the Orpheus myth and "Camille" and to vaguely evoke about a dozen other films. When the lovers sing a duet they begin with a few bars of the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love" and pass through bits of Phil Collins, U2, and David Bowie and Brian Eno before capping it off with Elton John's "Your Song." It's as if the director, Baz Luhrmann, felt that he could hold the target audience of young people only by making reference to their entire experience of pop music. Luhrmann has a talent for décor, sudden shifts in perspective, and gentle, twinkling nighttime effects, but he whips much of the movie into an opéra-bouffe clownishness.—*D.D.* (5/28/01) (Ziegfeld.)

THE MUMMY RETURNS

A huge popular success, but harder to follow than "Memento," whose story runs backward, or "The Circle," which is in Farsi. It has something to do with cursed tombs and the return of legions of mummies, but the plot is gibberish, the action is garbled, and there is such a superfluity of prancing creatures, devil-eyed villains, and roiling clouds of digital dust that one can only respond to it as a series of random sensations. Call it camp without jokes. Directed by the shockmeister Steven Sommers. With Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz as the married adventurer-archeologist team and the wrestler Dwayne Johnson, known as the Rock, who emerges in all his glory at the movie's end wearing giant crab claws.—*D.D.* (5/28/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

PEARL HARBOR

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Chelsea West, Cinema I, Cinema II, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, and Union Square.)

ROMAN HOLIDAY

Charming. This is the 1953 picture that made Audrey Hepburn a movie star. Probably no one could have brought out her skinny, long-necked gamine magic as winningly as the director William Wyler did; his calm, elegant style prepares the scenes and builds the character until she has the audience in thrall, and when she smiles we're all goners.—*P.K.* (The Screening Room; June 1-2.)

LE SAMOURAÏ

In Jean-Pierre Melville's coolest, sleekest, and most influential salute to the hardworking professionals of the French underworld, Alain Delon plays a hit man who dodges the minions of a double-crossing employer, as well as the police, after murdering a night-club boss. Although the antihero has a faithful moll (Nathalie Delon) and a thing for the night club's alluring pianist (Cathy Rosier), his attachments are all business. Melville's precision craftsmanship, compelling throughout, triumphs in a chase through the Métro. Originally released in 1967. In French.—*M.S.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; June 2.)

SHERMAN'S MARCH

In Ross McElwee's New South, the word "reconstruction" no longer suggests carpetbaggers and the Ku Klux Klan but rather eye-bag surgery and fanny tucks. That's just one of the observations to be gleaned from this random, sprawling, yet uproarious 1986 docu-comedy. It's about what happens when the Southern-born, Cambridge-based McElwee sets out to make a documentary about Sherman's March—and his girlfriend breaks up with him just before he heads South. He trips through Dixie anyway, and chronicles the romantic farce and anguish that ensue.—*M.S.* (Museum of Modern Art; June 2 and June 4.)



Rob Schneider in "The Animal."

SHREK

The Shrek of the title is a bile-green ogre with disgusting personal habits and, this being an animated feature, an essential sweetness of nature. On the orders of a wicked lord, he rescues a princess from a dragon, only to screw up the plans by falling in love with her. The new DreamWorks production is overtly snook-cocking, turning every available fairy tale on its head: the princess has a short temper and karate skills, the dragon has the hots for a donkey, and the lord's castle is as tacky as a theme park. On the other hand, the film itself is hardly rough and real; however cunning the rendering of surfaces, there's still something flat and charmless in the digital look, and most of the pleasure rises not from the main romance but from the quick, incidental gags. In particular, look out for the Three Little Breakdancing Pigs. With voices by Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz, Eddie Murphy, and John Lithgow.—*A.L.* (5/21/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinema, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

STARTUP.COM

A fascinating cinéma-vérité documentary account of how two very young men—Kaleil Isaza Tuz-

man, a Goldman, Sachs employee, and Tom Herman, a techie—started an Internet company in New York, burned through sixty million dollars, lost their way, and got swallowed up by another company, all within eighteen months. The filmmakers Jehane Noujaim and Chris Hegedus nosed their way into meetings and arguments and drove around with the two men as they aired their desires and fears. Tuzman is burly and handsome, with an easy, ready way about him; Herman, who keeps growing and shaving a dark beard, is high-minded and tends to be diffident about the fate of the enterprise itself. The two men emerge from the fiasco without any money but with their friendship intact. The movie's account of their dealings with one another is painfully funny and very intimate, perhaps too much so: it would have been useful to have more detail about how the business actually worked and why it went wrong.—*D.D.* (5/14/01) (Film Forum.)

THE TAILOR OF PANAMA

A messy adaptation of the John le Carré novel, directed by John Boorman. As Andy Osnard, Pierce Brosnan plays an anti-Bond: the spy who loves nobody except himself. He is sent to Panama, where he recruits a local tailor, Harry Pendel (Geoffrey Rush)—who, like so many le Carré creations, has constructed the story of himself to escape from a shameful, secret past. Boorman wants to turn the novel's rueful satire into something sharp and sweaty, but the tone veers all over the place, and the plot feels like reckless fantasy.—*A.L.* (4/2/01) (Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 62nd & Broadway.)

TIME AND TIDE

The peaceful title is just a feint. In his thirty-eighth movie, the Hong Kong director Tsui Hark serves up a healthy measure of hardboiled alienation and gyroscopic firefights. There's also a dizzying plot involving Brazilian mercenaries, the Triad, and pregnant women, but the deft escapes and the how-did-they-do-that shots provide all the gravity the film needs. You can't look away. Pop stars Wu Bai and Nicholas Tse play the lead roles and contribute to the synth-heavy soundtrack. In Cantonese and Mandarin.—*M.A.* (Village East Cinemas.)

UNDER THE SAND

A fine new feature from the French director François Ozon: his quietest creation to date, but also his most provocative. Charlotte Rampling plays Marie, whose husband disappears from a beach; everyone but Marie believes him dead, and Ozon finds both method and madness in her noble refusal to meet the truth. What could have been glum or morbid is made almost thrilling by Ozon's ruthless cuts and punchy compositions, and Rampling sways back and forth between the liteness of youth and the fallen hopes of middle age. The ending, suitably enough, is too mysterious for words. With Bruno Cremer as the missing man. In French.—*A.L.* (5/21/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

WITH A FRIEND LIKE HARRY...

A smart new horror story, at once thrilling and upsetting, from the director Dominik Moll. Michel (Laurent Lucas), a typically fretful father on vacation with his wife and children, meets an old schoolmate named Harry (Sergi López), who promptly starts changing Michel's life for the better. This entails buying him a new car and then getting to work on his ornery parents, his tired wife, and his frustrated ambitions as a writer. You can't really fault Harry's logic, and that's what makes him so daunting; his analysis of Michel's messy existence would do for just about anyone. It's his homicidal methods that somehow feel de trop, although Michel can no more be rid of him than Othello could slip from the clutches of Iago. All this is told with a tight, nervy concentration. Anyone thinking of getting married and starting a family should probably stay clear of Moll's movie. As for driving around Europe, forget it. In French.—*A.L.* (5/7/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

ABOUT ADAM

Angelika Film Center, East 85th Street, and Sutton 1 and 2.

ANGEL EYES

Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.

CALLE 54

Angelika Film Center.

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

(12/11/00)
Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.

EURKA

State.

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (2/5/01)

Village East Cinemas.

THE MAN WHO CRIED

Angelika Film Center and 72nd Street East.

OUR SONG

Film Forum.

THE ROAD HOME

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.

Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.

Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).

Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.

Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.

Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.

Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.

Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.

Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.

(924-3363).

Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.

East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.

East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.

84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.

Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.

(398-3939).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.

Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth

Ave. (727-8110).

First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.

42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St.

near Eighth Ave.

Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.

Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.

Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.

Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.

New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.

19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.

Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.

Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.

Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).

Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.

Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.

The Screening Room, 54 Varick St.

(334-2100).

72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.

64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.

State, Broadway at 45th St.

Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.

Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.

Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.

Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center

(875-5600).

Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—
"Gary Cooper: A Centennial Celebration." June 2
at 2: "The Virginian" (1929, Victor Fleming). ♦
June 3 at 2: "Morocco" (†). ♦ June 3 at 4: "The
Winning of Barbara Worth" (1926, Henry King). ♦
Repertory night. June 2 at 6:30: "Le Samourai" (†).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—May 5 at
7:30: A restored print of Lewis Milestone's "The
Red Pony" (1949).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—May 30
at 7:30: "The Woman Disputed" (1928, Henry King
and Sam Taylor; silent). ♦ May 31 at 4:30, 6:30, and
9:30: "Animal Factory" (2000, Steve Buscemi). ♦
June 1-5 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Farewell, Home
Sweet Home" (1999, Otar Iosseliani; in French).

CINEMA CLASSICS

332 E. 11th St. (971-1015)—May 30 at 8 and 10:
"The Conformist" (1970, Bernardo Bertolucci; in
Italian). ♦ May 31-June 3 at 7:55 and 10: "Dark
Habits" (1983, Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish). ♦
June 4-5 at 8 and 10: "The Celluloid Closet"
(1995, Robert Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—
"Ladies They Talk About: The Women of Pre-
Code." June 1-2 at 1, 4:05, 7:20, and 10:25:
"Baby Face" (1933, Alfred E. Green). ♦ June 1-2
at 2:25, 5:30, and 8:45: "Ladies They Talk
About" (†). ♦ June 3 at 1, 4:05, 7:10, and 10:15:
"Waterloo Bridge" (1931, James Whale). ♦ June 3
at 2:35, 5:40, and 8:45: "Susan Lennox: Her Fall &
Rise" (1931, Robert Z. Leonard). ♦ June 4 at 1:30,
4:50, and 8:10 and June 5 at 1:30 and 4:50: "A

Free Soul" (†). ♦ June 4 at 3:15, 6:35, and 9:55 and
June 5 at 3:15: "The Divorcee" (1930, Leonard).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—"Conversations
Between Shadows and Light: Italian Cinematog-
raphy." June 1 at 7 and June 2 at 3: "The Conjugal
Bed" (1963, Marco Ferreri; in Italian). ♦ June 2
at 7: "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis" (1970,
Vittorio De Sica; in Italian).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-
9480)—Through June 19: "First Run Features: A
Retrospective, 1979-2001." May 31 at 6: "Joe's
Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads" (1982, Spike
Lee). ♦ June 1 at 3:30 and June 3 at 2: "Hongfen"
(1994, Li Shaohong; in Cantonese). ♦ June 1 at 6
and June 5 at 3:30: "Alice" (1988, Jan Svankmajer;
in Czech and English). ♦ June 1 at 8: "She Must Be
Seeing Things" (1987, Sheila McLaughlin). ♦ June
2 at 1:30 and June 4 at 6: "Sherman's March" (†). ♦
June 2 at 5 and June 4 at 3:30: "Time Indefinite"
(1993, Ross McElwee). ♦ June 3 at 5: "The Water-
melon Woman" (1997, Cheryl Dunye).

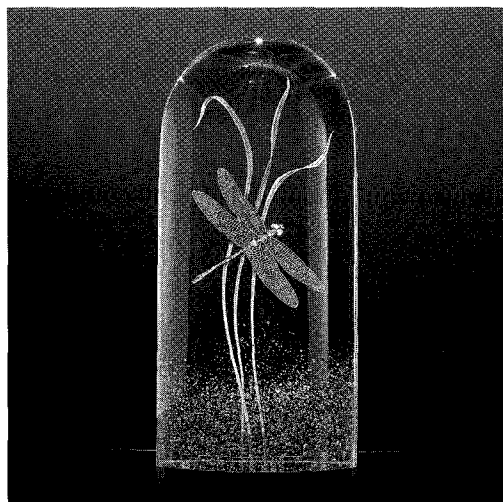
THE SCREENING ROOM

54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Through June 14: An
Audrey Hepburn retrospective. June 1 at 5:30,
7:45, and 10, June 2 at 3:15, June 3 at 1:30, 5:45,
and 10, June 4 at 5:45 and 10, and June 5 at 3:30
and 7:50: "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961, Blake
Edwards). ♦ June 1 at 3:15 and June 2 at 1, 5:30,
7:45, and 10: "Roman Holiday" (†). ♦ June 3-4 at
3:45 and 8: "Funny Face" (†).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through June 14:
"Open Roads: New Italian Cinema." All films are in
Italian. June 1 at 6 and June 2 at 9:15: "Bread and
Tulips" (2000, Silvio Soldini). ♦ June 1 at 8:45 and
June 2 at 4: "The Hundred Steps" (2000, Marco
Tullio Giordana). ♦ June 2 at 6:40 and June 3 at
9:15: "Blind Fairies" (2001, Ferzan Ozpetek). ♦
June 3 at 5 and June 4 at 8:30: "La Capagira"
(1999, Alessandro Piva).

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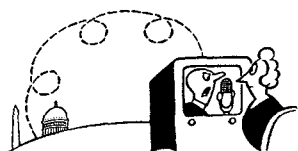
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT TAXING FRIENDSHIPS



When Senator James Jeffords, of Vermont, pulled up his pajamas and jumped out of the Republican sack last week, it was a reminder that the bed-fellows politics makes can get a little too strange. Jeffords and George W. Bush were never a comfortable fit. But Bush and Dorothy Day? Whose idea could *that* have been? It couldn't have been hers; the saintly founder of the Catholic Worker movement has been dead for twenty-one years. It couldn't have been his; the current occupant of the White House is not exactly steeped in the lore of left-wing agitation, Catholic asceticism, voluntary poverty, uncompromising pacifism, and Greenwich Village bohemianism, all of which were hallmarks of Day's amazing life.

The Day-Bush rendezvous occurred halfway through a commencement address the latter delivered at Notre Dame University. "This is my message today: there is no great society which is not a caring society," the President said. "And any effective war on poverty must deploy what Dorothy Day called 'the weapons of spirit.'" It was an unusually audacious speech. Although Ronald Reagan was mentioned in passing—as the 1980 running mate of "my dad"—the two Presi-

dents who were actually praised were Democrats. One was Lyndon Johnson, who was quoted reverently and at length. The other, surprisingly, was neither Franklin Roosevelt nor John Kennedy. Instead, there was this, rounding off a discussion of the 1996 welfare law: "Work and self-respect have been returned to many lives. That is a tribute to the Republicans and Democrats who agreed on reform, and to the President who signed it: President Bill Clinton." A forbidden thrill! (In this postmodern age, even an applause line can be transgressive.) Jimmy Carter was not referred to by name, but the text borrowed a theme from his "malaise" speech, phrasing it with a touch of urbane languor: "Materialism, ultimately, is boring, and con-

sumerism can build a prison of wants."

The capper, though, was Dorothy Day. To be sure, D.D. and W. have a few things in common. D.D., as Dwight Macdonald noted in these pages in 1952, was the offspring of "solid Republican and Episcopalian" parents; so was W. He's a joiner, and so was she: he joined Skull & Bones, whose members are known as Bonesmen, and she joined the Industrial Workers of the World, whose members were known as Wobblies. He enjoyed the pleasures of alcohol at a certain stage of life, as did she. (Her youthful partners in conviviality included Eugene O'Neill and Max Eastman, among other lowlifes. "The gangsters admired Dorothy Day," Malcolm Cowley wrote, "because she could drink them under the table.") Finally, both D.D. and W. underwent experiences of religious conversion (hers, perhaps, was the more profound) that left their political preferences essentially unchanged. But, ah, those political preferences.

The Notre Dame speech is part of a familiar pattern. As the policies of the Bush Administration get more and more set in hard-right concrete, the speeches of the President (if not those of his privy councillors) sound more and more like the Brotherhood Week sermons of an earnest liberal clergyman, circa 1964. This is checks and balances, Bush style: the very rich get the checks, drawn on the United States Treasury; the less rich get homilies about the emptiness of materialism; the poor are advised to get religion. They'll need it. The quantitative



Dorothy Day



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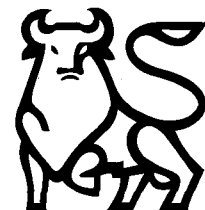
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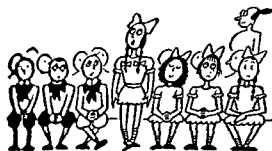
heart of the Bush program, dwarfing everything else, is a huge upward redistribution of wealth and income, and the heart of its heart is the tax bill the Republicans pushed through the Senate last week—just twenty-four hours before Senator Jeffords decamped to do a little checking and balancing of his own. There are many ways to particularize the naked greed behind this bill. Here is one: fully phased in, the tax cut will confer upon the average taxpayer in the richest one per cent of the population a monthly stipend amounting to, by the most conservative estimate, something in excess of three thousand dollars; for the very richest four hundred, the monthly take will be fifty grand. At the other end of the spectrum, the least rich twenty per cent will get, on average, five dollars and forty cents a month. The poorest ten per cent will get less than nothing, because the public services on which they rely will have to be trimmed.

For those at the very bottom—the destitute and despised, the homeless and hungry—the Administration offers faith-based initiatives. No initiative has ever been more faith-based than the Catholic Worker communities, a hundred and seventy-five of which still provide food and shelter around the country. Dorothy Day would have welcomed the fellows from the White House, particularly if they were willing to help out in the kitchen. But she would have done

without their money. Take it from the late Michael Harrington, who spent two years as a volunteer in the Catholic Worker house on the Lower East Side (and wrote his first article on poverty in America for the *Catholic Worker*, the movement's penny-a-copy newspaper). "When a high-ranking official of the Ford Foundation wanted to give the Catholic Worker a large grant in the early fifties," Harrington recalled in his autobiography, "Dorothy Day turned it down on the grounds that the followers of St. Francis of Assisi could not have a balance in a bank account." Her successors feel the same way. What she would have thought of the Bush tax program is, of course, unknowable. But one can hazard the guess that she wouldn't have liked it any better than Senator Jeffords does.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

KIDS TODAY THE NEW BATHROOM WALL



A few weeks ago, a group of high-school students at Marymount, a private girls' school on the Upper East Side, alerted their adviser to a Web page that had become the talk of upper

schools around the city. It was called "Interschool Hos," and it invited kids to vote for whomever they deemed to be the most promiscuous private-school student in New York.

"Ok, here's wat to do," the text at the top of the page read. "Just enter the name of the person in the interschool who u think is the biggest ho (be them FEMALE or MALE) and write the number of their grade next to their name (maybe even their school). And since its anonymous, u can write about whomever u please!" The author of these directions identified him or herself by the apparent nom de spam of Nicole Blair, whose demonstrated familiarity with both pimp-speak and the proper use of "whomever" would indicate time spent at one of the elite schools on the list: Brearley, Calhoun, Chapin, Collegiate, Dalton, Friends, Horace Mann, Marymount, Nightingale-Bamford, Packer, Trinity, Riverdale, Spence, Saint Ann's, and others. After naming these, Blair stated his or her intentions: "This is a public service that will help protect everyone out there from dem dam nasty, grimy, well ridden, loose ass hos (or help u otha hos get sum)."

What followed was a list of about a hundred and fifty names, ranked according to the number of votes each had received. Girls outnumbered boys on the list by about three to one. More than thirteen thousand votes had been cast (though participants could vote more than once, making it impossible to tell how many voters there had been). Many of the students listed were identified by school and grade, as well as by various colorful but not very tasteful remarks—standard bathroom-wall graffiti, rendered less standard by its being distributed over the World Wide Web: "da one from chapin," "the Fendi Bitch," "green skirt, she's super fast!," "will do anything to you for moldy bread," "however you spell her name . . . u know shes a hoe," "p.s. the head rocked," and "damn skanky." The big winner was a boy, who earned a thousand one hundred and sixty votes and the terse sobriquet "classless ho." The next four spots were occupied by students from three girls' schools, including one ninth-grade trio of "hot lil sluts." After that, mayhem, with the occasional threat or question, such as "What about public-school ho's?"



"The unibrow look, Collins—get used to it!"

(This sentiment garnered four votes.)

Appalled, Carole France, the head of the upper school at Marymount, called around to administrators at some of the other schools. None of them had heard anything about "Interschool Hos," but, as they soon discovered, their students had. The schools sent letters to the parents of the students mentioned, alerting them to the site.

The page was part of a Web site called FreeVote.com, which creates online "voting booths," where people can conduct polls: best school band in Singapore, cutest guy in Vancouver, best names for pet squirrels, that kind of thing. Since FreeVote.com claimed to have a policy forbidding "excessive profanity, graphic or sexual content . . . and the degradation or abuse of others" ("Interschool Hos" seemed to fit the bill), some of the school administrators E-mailed FreeVote.com's "abuse department," requesting that the page be taken down. But for a week they heard nothing. The site remained up. And more students, attracted by word of mouth, logged on to vote.

Not long afterward, the mother of one girl who had made the list alerted the Brooklyn District Attorney's office. The D.A., Charles Hynes, assigned two staff members, Melissa Jackson and Adam Zion, to look into the matter, and they determined that there was nothing criminal about it and therefore little they could do. "It's very clear: there's no accounting for taste, but the site is protected by the First Amendment free-speech clause," Hynes said last week.

"You know how high-school kids are—their enemies become 'ho's,'" Zion said. "You go after the rich kid you don't really like because he went to Vail for Christmas break. This is nothing new. It's just that it's on the Web."

Nonetheless, on May 17th Zion called one of the owners of FreeVote.com, a twenty-two-year-old University of Washington student named Marcus Oesterwinter, just to let him know that the Brooklyn D.A. had received complaints. Oesterwinter got the message. "They became aware that we were looking at it, and they shut it down," Hynes said.

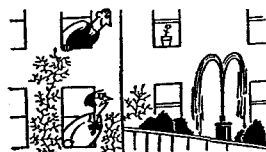
"This site was so awful," a mother who has a daughter in one of the schools

and who saw the site said. "With the Internet, there's such a breakdown of civility. Because of the anonymity factor, you can say and write the most awful things. It's frightening."

The kids don't seem quite as outraged, having grown accustomed to communicating with each other via group E-mail, and all that entails: anonymity, slander, deliberate misspellings. "It's not that big a deal, the language," one girl, a junior who heard about the list but never saw it, said last week. "We call each other 'ho's' all the time. It's nothing, but these girls on the list, the ones I heard about, really are ho's. I know someone who was on it. I talked to her, sort of. She seemed, like, happy to be, like, getting the attention. But, yeah, she was probably hurt, or whatever. Most of the girls probably are pretty psyched just that people are talking about them."

—Nick Paumgarten

DEPT. OF GOOD INTENTIONS VANDAL IN A VOLVO



In the summer of 1999, the artist Ellen Harvey travelled up to 181st Street to paint the lampposts gold in Highbridge Park—a stretch of blasted, trash-crammed parkland along the Harlem River. After she'd finished the lampposts, she walked over to a graffiti-covered concrete pylon with her box of paint supplies. As neighborhood teenagers gathered to watch, she pulled out a stencil the size of an ostrich egg, traced an oval on the pylon, and filled it in with white gesso. When that dried, she painted a miniature copy of a Poussin country scene—lush trees, clear streams, azure sky—out of a picture book of landscapes. The result was a porthole, framed by graffiti and grime, opening onto a vista of unspoiled countryside. "A kid came up to me and said, 'Man, I want to get a job like that! How much do they pay you?'" she recalled recently. "I said, 'Nothing, actually.' He said, 'Man, you got to get another job!'" But Harvey did not get another job; in fact, she likes this one so much that she has



Ellen Harvey and a critic

been painting these idylls ever since, and has now left forty of them on improbable, derelict surfaces all over town, in what she calls the New York Beautification Project. ("This is the kind of art project that we should be supporting," Mayor Giuliani told Harvey's dealer, Laurie De Chiara, when she ran into him at an Upper East Side cigar bar not long ago.)

"A lot of people get upset when they watch me work," Harvey said. "They say, 'But your painting will be destroyed!' I want people to think about what they think an oil painting is about. It doesn't have to be precious."

The other day, she set out to execute New York Beautification Project No. 41, in anticipation of an exhibit of her work, at P.S.1's Clocktower Gallery. "Let's go out hunting!" she said. Tall, with close-cropped red-brown hair, Harvey, who is thirty-three years old, was wearing a bright-orange padded jacket, beige corduroys, and silver-clear glasses. In her battered maroon Volvo, she began searching the western edge of Williamsburg, where she lives, for surfaces that were suitably blighted but smooth. Among all the loading docks, factories, and abandoned buildings, nothing seemed quite right, so she edged into Greenpoint. Suddenly, near the corner of Manhattan Avenue and Dupont Street, along a stretch of grim row houses, she spotted her site: "Oh, here's a boarded-up window that'll be good!" Graffiti on the window read "Cuddles" and "Hotty Girl." Harvey parked the

car and got out with her paint box, watched closely by an old woman who stood about twenty yards away, wearing a duffel coat and a pair of rubber gloves. The woman stared as Harvey held the stencil to the window, outlined it, and filled it in. "This is really a good spot," Harvey said. "It's visible, it's..."

"Hey!" The old woman in the rubber gloves was approaching. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, this is going to be a landscape," Harvey said amiably.

"That's graffiti," the woman barked. "You can get arrested for that." Hoping to calm her down, Harvey pulled out her Beautification map, which had a reproduction of one of her bucolic ovals on it. "I don't care—you don't live here, we do," the woman said, brushing the map away. "We don't want it! If the cops come round here, you'll get a ticket. You gotta get out of here!"

"All right, I'll wipe it off," Harvey said, and did so with a swipe of her palm. The woman scowled until Harvey left.

"If somebody doesn't want me to do it, I don't want to do it," Harvey said as she drove off. "This has never happened before. Well, we'll find another space." Back in Williamsburg, on North Ninth Street, she stopped in front of an abandoned brick building, its windows shuttered with sheets of metal. Harvey chose a brown metal panel under a rusted fire escape. She made her oval, then consulted a book of landscapes to find a good one to copy.

A man walked up. He was compact, muscular, and evidently very angry. "You people have a lot of fun!" he said. "It doesn't fucking matter to you if it's not your fucking property. You're fucking vandalizing other people's property!"

Harvey held out the picture of the landscape she intended to paint. "But it's going to be beautiful," she said.

"It's not fucking beautiful. This is not your fucking property. I'm fucking calling the cops!"

"Fine, I'll take it off, and I'll come back and restore it to the way it was before," Harvey said. She wiped the gesso off the brown metal sheet, then beat a retreat to the Volvo. "I'll restore it to exactly the way it was before," she said. "Which was brown, with graffiti."

—Liesl Schillinger

POSTSCRIPT SUSANNAH MCCORKLE



"For all we know / We may never meet again. / Before you go / Make this moment sweet again. . . / Tomorrow was made for some, / Tomorrow may never come, / For all we know." A few months ago, over a so-so bottle of wine in a tranquil garden in Washington, D.C., Susannah McCorkle was praising Sam M. Lewis's lyrics for their directness. She had included "For All We Know" on her new record, and I was praising her direct way with the song's directness. Now the song is too bruising to hear. In the middle of the night on May 19th, having placed a will on her desk and a note in her pocket asking anybody who discovered her body to look after her cats, Susannah jumped out the window of her apartment, on West Eighty-sixth Street.

The thought of this gentle intelligence falling sixteen floors in the windy darkness is an evil thought. What affliction of her heart demanded this fatal remedy? Immediately, the explanations began to appear. Her record company had dropped her; she had been warring with cancer; she was lonely; she was depressed. Causes for despair, all, but Susannah belonged, or so I had believed, to the "Good morning heartache, sit down" school of her idol, the great stoic thinker Billie Holiday, who disarmed despair with familiarity, even with hospitality. Susannah seemed to inhabit a universe that often wounded but never warranted bitterness. In a recent letter about a "fledgling romance" that she had decided to "transform into a friendship," she had stoutly remarked, "I continue to expect to find my soulmate by not looking for him at all. Life has so many other pleasures." And in her music, too, Susannah seemed to have found a way to live with disappointment, to manage disillusion by making it lovely. (Consider her tenderly wised-up rendition of "Weren't We Fools," an underservedly obscure song that Cole Porter wrote for Fanny Brice in 1927.)

Jazz singing has rarely prospered so richly from sweetness of temper. She was a doll. Her breath-beautiful, unexpectedly

intimate, and fiercely discriminating voice was forever patrolling the frontier between girlishness and womanliness. The imp ran gladly with the vamp. Susannah was not a blues singer, even when she sang about the blues. Her achievement was based, instead, on an extraordinary intuition of the musicality of language. With a scholar's strain and a poet's liberty, she studied the words that she sang in their meanings and in their sounds, until meaning and sound became indistinguishable; and in this way she made speech into an experience of the senses. Susannah was certainly the most literary singer in the history of her art. She knew many languages, and translated from them. She wrote stories and learned articles about the traditions of American song—most recently, a fine exploration of the work of Irving Berlin. And she was working on a book, a big, delightful mess of a manuscript that was a memoir on its way to a novel, about her adventures in the nineteen-sixties, as a cool, delicate American chick prowling the Piazza Navona. It was a vivacious journal of a young woman's openness to the world. I recall her happy giggle when I told her that she should call it "Innocence, A Broad."

On her last visit to Washington, Susannah wanted to talk about books more than about songs; she holed up in her room with "The Education of Henry Adams" and a pile of old Faber & Faber volumes of poetry and the catalogue of the Wayne Thiebaud retrospective. She reported a little grimly that her situation as a singer was becoming very difficult (how could it be anything else, I thought, for somebody so utterly lacking in vulgarity?); but the impression of a foundering woman vanished when she reported cheerfully on the musical workshops she was conducting for children. Susannah conferred upon friendship the glamour of romance. She was finespun, without spin, a genuinely lyrical being, a heroine of the inner life born of city life. And then she went and smashed all these blessings on a Manhattan sidewalk. "I believe that no man ever threw away life, while it was worth keeping," a philosopher once observed. By what reason, this certainty? In an existence of illusions and mistakes, suicide, too, may be an illusion and a mistake. Life is worth keeping, for all we know.

—Leon Wieseltier

THE FINANCIAL PAGE POOR LITTLE BIG OIL

In November, 1919, coal miners across the United States walked off the job. Not surprisingly, the price of coal soared. Soon enough, the mine owners settled with the strikers. But within a few years the owners tried to back out of the deal. Again, the workers walked off the job and prices soared. Since coal was the country's chief source of heating fuel and steam power, the strikes created what we would today call an energy crisis, the first of the twentieth century. Higher coal prices meant colder homes and less profitable factories. Or they would have, if the higher prices and the shaky supply hadn't prompted people to search for alternatives to coal. The cheapest alternative was fuel oil; between 1919 and 1923, fuel-oil sales jumped by almost forty per cent. By 1923, coal prices had come back down. Homes stayed warm. Factories stayed open. And all this happened, believe it or not, without a National Energy Policy.

By comparison, what's happening today seems rather mild. Yes, gas prices are high. But wholesale prices have tumbled in the past two weeks, and the futures market is predicting that the worst is past. With the exception of California—which has fashioned a unique set of problems for itself—there are no energy shortages. This is less a crisis than a natural boom in prices in what is, let's face it, the original boom-and-bust business. For most of the nineteen-nineties, gasoline and power were remarkably cheap. Now they're not. We should be able to handle this. The price of any commodity—whether coffee or D-RAM chips—often swings wildly. That does not a crisis make.

The Bush Administration's National Energy Policy Development Group disagrees. Strongly: "A fundamental imbalance between supply and demand defines our nation's energy crisis," it declares in its recent report. To back up the crisis idea, the report gives us a chilling first chart—page viii, if you're following along at home—which graphs the future of U.S. energy consumption and production over the next twenty years. Con-

sumption rises at a steady rate, while production stays flat. These projections, the report explains, are based on the rate of energy consumption and production over the past ten years. And by 2020 there's a huge gap between the two.

What's missing from the chart, though, is the most important variable: price. Americans consumed energy in huge quantities in the nineties because it was cheap. (In the fall of 1998, a barrel of oil was going for \$8.50. Today it costs about \$28.) And American companies cut back on producing energy because, oh yeah, it was cheap. Now that energy is more expensive, both those things will change. We'll produce more and use less.

You sometimes hear that the price of



energy doesn't really affect the way consumers act. If people need to drive to get to work, they'll do what they have to do, and hang the cost. This makes intuitive sense, and it fits with the image of Americans as gas-guzzling S.U.V.-huggers. But it's wrong. Past energy crises have shown that price makes a huge difference in the way people use energy, just as it affects the way they use everything else. Sometimes people substitute one form of energy for another. Or sometimes they use existing fuel more efficiently, as they did during the sharp spike in oil prices of the nineteen-seventies. In the sixties, U.S. energy consumption was growing at eight per cent every year. Between 1974 and 1985, it grew just .15 per cent a year. People adjusted.

Price also has a big impact on the supply side. Raise the price of oil and gas, and companies start figuring out how to get and sell more of it. They're not going to sit idly by while there are profits to be had. This year, energy companies expect to put forty-one billion dollars into natural-gas exploration. They're increasing spending on oil and gas exploration by twenty-five per cent. And the number of new gas rigs is at an all-time peak. Higher oil and gas prices also mean that energy sources that have typically been too expensive to be real alternatives—like geothermal and wind—start to look better. There's no "fundamental imbalance between supply and demand"; there's just a market, in which buyers and sellers adjust to higher prices.

The best thing the Bush Administration can do to solve the energy "crisis," then, is nothing. Let the market do what it's best at. But the Bush energy plan isn't pro-market. It's pro-business. Actually, it's pro-energy business. And, above all, it's pro-traditional-energy business. Setting out a National Energy Policy suggests that companies in the energy business are uniquely important and deserving of assistance—in the form of either tax breaks or regulatory leniency—and that they should be insulated from risk. The Cheney report might as well include a photograph of Lee R. Raymond, the ExxonMobil chairman: "You can help him or you can turn the page." He doesn't need your help.

The whole idea of a national policy is a leftover from the early eighties, when wonkish journals and government reports whined about how America was doomed, because, unlike Japan and Germany, it did not have a coherent national industrial policy. Those countries catered to their corporate powerhouses and subsidized the development of new technologies. In the parlance of the time, they picked winners. Unfortunately, national policies—whether for energy or agriculture—do more to support incumbents than to encourage innovation. All of which makes you wonder what the Bush people mean when they talk about the miracle of the markets. When, exactly, did the invisible hand become the invisible handout?

—James Surowiecki

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LETTER FROM LONDON

LABOUR'S LOVE LOST

Why is everyone so annoyed with the man headed for another landslide?

BY JOE KLEIN

On June 7th, Tony Blair is likely to become the first Labour Party Prime Minister ever to be elected to two consecutive terms with large majorities. His party's support is impregnable, according to the polls. His opponents are negligible. He has, in his first term, corrected many long-held public prejudices about the Labour Party: that it can't manage an economy; that it is perpetually in thrall to the loony left and trades-union bullies who dominated the Party in the seventies; that it is hexed, disaster-prone, stupidly ideological. Blair has shattered all that. He has proved to be a proper, energetic, intelligent, and, above all, competent Prime Minister of a generally happy nation.

And yet his campaign has been a mess. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet have stumbled about the country, embarrassed almost daily by awkward, stage-managed, and tone-deaf meetings with civilians. The press, which feared a boring campaign, has enjoyed this immensely. In fact, Blair has been in trouble of one sort or another from the day the campaign officially began. Normally, the calling of an election is a fairly noncontroversial ritual. The Prime Minister visits the Queen. He then makes a formal announcement, in front of his Downing Street residence, of the dissolution of the Government. On May 8th, Blair did visit the Queen, but he made the public announcement—in shirtsleeves—at a church school in the south of London, a school selected because it was said to have improved dramatically as a result of financial support from the Labour Government.

This was the sort of photo opportunity that is now routine in American politics but remains a bit unnatural for the Brits: such manipulations are derided as "American-style" or "Presidential" campaigning (presumed to be too insubstantial and regal for a British Prime Minister, who is, after all, the meat-and-potatoes legislative leader of his party; it is the Queen's job to wander about smil-

ing vacantly for photo-ops). The speech Blair gave that day, before a group of young girls, probably seemed a good idea to the consultants who relentlessly massage the Prime Minister's image. (Some, like Robert Shrum and the pollster Stan Greenberg, are Clinton veterans.) It was a review of the Government's greatest hits, a recitation of the economic improvements of the past four years. But Blair gave most of his attention to the cameras and barely acknowledged the students. He used terms like "negative equity." The students responded appropriately, with yawns and idle doodling. The press also responded appropriately, with universal disgust. "The whole event stank of spin doctors' sweat," wrote Simon Hoggart in the *Guardian*, a daily newspaper perceived to be a friend of Labour.

A week later, another symbolic event—the launch of the Labour Party manifesto, a document that resembles an American party "platform" but is given far more prominence in the campaign—was swallowed by a wave of spontaneous calamities. As Blair and his ministers fanned out across the country to promote the manifesto, they were rudely treated by a not very worshipful public. In the most notorious incident, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott—a fiery Old Labour sort, a former ship steward—was pelted by an egg at close range and responded with a left jab. (The egg was tossed by an exceptionally large farmhand upset by high fuel prices and by Labour's alleged lack of interest in rural matters.) But other incidents that day were, in a way, more troubling. Home Secretary Jack Straw was assaulted with cries of "rubbish" from a police-association audience. Peter Mandelson, a former Cabinet member and political mechanic who remains a close Blair associate, stormed out of a television interview when he was asked a question touching on the allegedly strained relationship be-

tween Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown (reminiscent of the chill between Bill Clinton and Al Gore). And Blair himself was confronted by a distraught woman named Sharron Storer at a hospital: the man she'd been living with had been diagnosed with cancer and was receiving dreadful care from the National Health Service.

The woeful show touched off a frenzy of chin-pulling in the British press: Labour was finally suffering the consequences of its arrogant, American-style soap selling and spin doctoring. (The latter has come to be considered a particularly diabolical profession in England.) The cumulative weight of these embarrassments was, therefore, expected to have some negative effect on Labour's standing in the polls. But it didn't. Indeed, Labour's lead grew. A rout still loomed. This was attributable, at least in part, to the hapless state of the Conservative Opposition.

A cell phone rings. "If that's Tony Blair," says William Hague, the leader of the Conservative Party, "tell him it's too late to call off the election."

The audience laughs and cheers—a spontaneous moment, apparently. But it isn't. Hague has done the cell-phone bit before. It is the only real laugh in his stump speech, but the joke is mostly on him: halfway through the campaign, nothing the Tories have tried has worked. Hague's own father has said he expects them to lose the election. Indeed, Hague's real campaign is against expectations: if the Conservatives lose less badly than they did last time, when they gave up a hundred and fifty-six seats, it will be seen as a minor victory. The general feeling, even within the Conservative Party, is that another five years and several acts of God—and, perhaps, a more formidable leader—will be needed before the Party can seriously challenge Labour.

There are three things that most people in the United Kingdom know about William Hague. They know that he has been a working politician virtually since the age of sixteen, when he delivered a famous, rousing, and frighteningly precocious speech at a nationally televised Conservative Party convention. They also know that he speaks with a broad Yorkshire accent, which sounds quite pleasant to my ears—he has a soothing baritone voice—but which some Lon-

doners find provincial. And, most important, he looks rather strange for a politician, more like an aide than like a leader—bald, dour, far older than his forty years. (Far younger, too. He is often pictured by British cartoonists as a squalling baby, sometimes being pushed in a carriage by Margaret Thatcher.)

Even if Hague looked and spoke like

bright, and white.' I'm sure Alastair Campbell"—Blair's press secretary—"would go scouring the street in search of some darker faces to throw in. These are lovely people, but they are so old!"

I asked her if any of her friends were interested in politics. She laughed. "Well, my boyfriend is Labour. But most of my friends think that I'm a bit of a freak to be

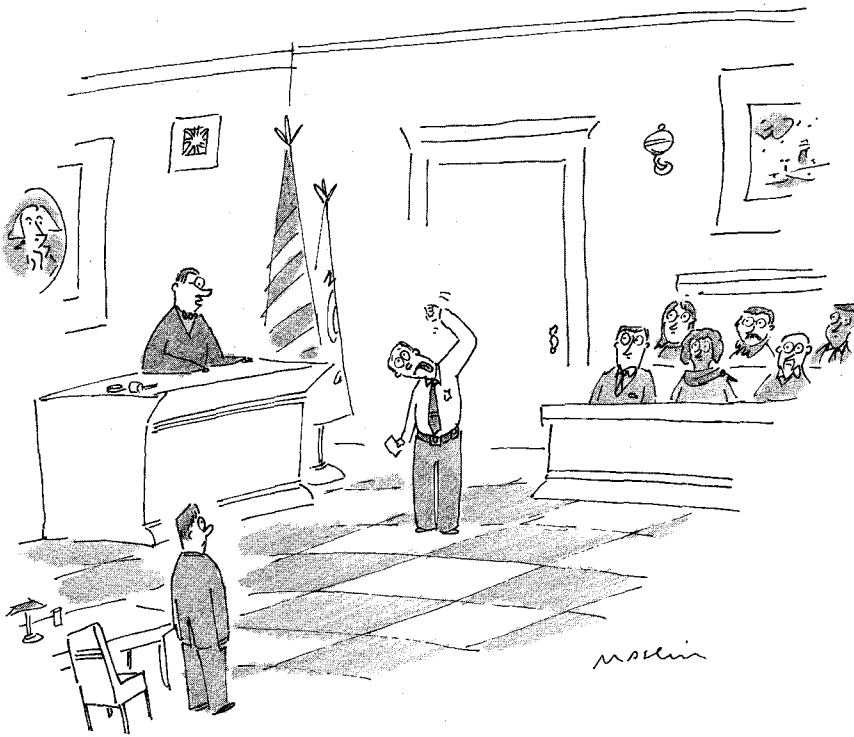


Tony Blair has been in some sort of trouble from the day the campaign began.

Laurence Olivier, his party would be in deep trouble. There are two serious structural problems that are crippling the Conservatives. The first was pointed out to me by an engaging young woman who serves as a low-level Hague campaign worker. We were standing outside a village hall in the northern town of Tynemouth, waiting for the candidate to arrive. The young woman scanned the crowd and said, "Look at them. I suppose Labour would call them 'right,

involved at all. They think it's hysterical."

In truth, the crowds that come out to greet Blair don't seem much younger than Hague's—interest in politics in Britain increasingly seems the province of the elderly (the same, by the way, was true in America during the 2000 Presidential campaign)—but the Labour audiences are more diverse. There is a reason for the diversity, and it constitutes the second problem Hague faces: about the only issues that "work" for the To-



"The bailiff—minus the theatrics—will now read the verdict."

ries, according to the polls, are loathsome ones. Hague has been dragged—reluctantly, one senses—to the populist right: he has proposed tax cuts, he has tried to seem tougher on crime than Labour does, he has tried to exploit anti-immigrant feeling by proposing detention camps to hold asylum seekers, most of whom come from the Balkans, while their entry applications are being processed. But his big issue is nationalism—keeping Britain “in Europe but not run by Europe,” particularly when it comes to the currency. (Blair, by contrast, has proposed a public referendum on whether to drop the venerable pound and adopt the euro.) This is a serious business, involving basic issues of national sovereignty, but it is an easy one to demagogue. Earlier this year, Hague said that he feared a second term under Labour would make Britain a “foreign land.” He meant this as a reference to the bureaucrats in Brussels who run the European Union, but it was taken by many as a reference to the many new Britons who are neither right nor white.

The young woman campaign worker told me that “Keep the Pound” was the issue that had made her a Tory. But the most immediate concerns in this election

appear to lie elsewhere: with public anger over severely underfunded public services like health care and education. Hague, who has proposed cuts in government services, has no real answer for that. He trundles about the country, and his speeches are more passionate than Blair’s, but they are less relevant, and his campaign seems to be shrivelling by the minute.

A day on the trail with Tony Blair is a better, but not much better. Four events were scheduled for the day after John Prescott’s jab. The first was a press conference in London. Blair is extremely good at such things. He has the political virtuoso’s ability to turn any question onto well-trod ground. (At the introduction of the Labour manifesto, the day before, he had taken forty-five minutes of questions and managed not to utter a substantive phrase he hadn’t uttered before.) But this was a potentially more difficult occasion: his deputy had, after all, punched out a citizen. And there was the larger issue of public anger at New Labour politicians. Blair played it brilliantly—doffing his jacket, joking about the combustible Prescott and yet supporting him. “John is John,” he said, with a knowing chuckle. “He has got very

great strengths—not least in his left arm.”

As for the public anger—in particular, the woman who had lectured Blair at the hospital—that was justified, too. “There are still individual people with a real sense of grievance,” Blair said. “It underlines the case for new investments in health and education services, which we are proposing. . . . That’s why this election matters. The Tories are proposing cuts in the funding of public services.”

After that, the day drifted off into photo-ops and vapor. We travelled from London to Manchester by bus. Blair visited a school that trained promising athletes; he chatted with the athletes. This was followed by a visit to another school, a notorious place in Halifax which had been turned around with Labour guidance and funds; Blair chatted with the former ruffians, who now wanted to become dentists and teachers. One girl asked Blair when and how he had become interested in politics. Not until his second year at university, he confided, as he sat planted picturesquely amid the students. “My father was very interested,” he added. “He was a Conservative. What made me get into it was that I started to think about the difference that *opportunities* can make for people, and I began to think it important that government provide those opportunities. . . . But at your age I was almost exclusively a rock and roller.”

The last, true by every contemporary account, was perhaps an attempt to distinguish himself from Hague’s teen-age political careerism. But Blair’s thumbnail political autobiography seemed a bit contrived and too convenient to be entirely true: giving people “opportunities” is a New Labour slogan. It seemed a rather antiseptic formulation to apply to a young man’s political awakening, which probably involved words like “justice” and “equality”—the very sort of words that Blair rarely uses now, which causes the left no end of despair.

Blair does have a rather synthetic quality. “A man without a hinterland,” Roderick Nye, the policy director for the Tories, says. And there is an indescribable something missing from his public persona. He is smart and accessible and sensible; he is a palpable human being, with passions—he is unfashionably devout—and mild quirks (he recently acknowledged enjoying “The Simpsons”),

and he still plays the guitar. But he always leaves one wondering if moments like the "Simpsons" revelation are, somehow, tactical—the latest planned attempt at humanization.

Blair's rehearsed, by-the-numbers campaign style inevitably raises comparisons to Bill Clinton's spontaneous emotional brilliance on the stump. Blair and Clinton are political twins, the Founding Fathers of the Third Way. Actually, Blair seems more the founding younger brother—but that, too, is unfair. His hologrammic persona is too easily conflated with the perceived deficiencies of his political beliefs: the Third Way is widely regarded in Britain, as in the United States, as something of a sham—a marketing strategy rather than a governing philosophy. And Blair is seen by his enemies, and even by many of his supporters, as little more than a salesman.

"There is a school of political thought that says, 'The only thing that matters is the poor,'" says Matthew Taylor, a former policy planner for Blair who has moved to the left in recent years and is now the director of the Institute for Public Policy Research. "You know, 'We need Labour to get elected because we'll be better than the Tories for the poor—and if we can win elections by going about and talking empty nonsense, then, by all means, let's do it.' I disagree. . . . I think that increasing public participation, and raising the quality of the debate, should be the goal of every campaign. I think the central issue should be how to involve the public in basic questions like: Which do you prize more, freedom or equality?"

Blair has actually been quite outspoken on the question of equality, but in a way that tends to annoy people like Taylor: the Prime Minister is opposed to income-redistribution schemes that soak the rich. He recently said that he was in favor of "levelling up, not levelling down," and added, "I refuse to be put in the position where we either have to choose between an economy that is run well and efficiently and a fair and decent society." Now, there's a sentence that needs parsing—indeed, it is probably very close to what both Bill Clinton and Tony Blair mean when they call their philosophy the Third Way. Blair has opposed an income-tax increase ("levelling down") in both of his campaigns; it would, presumably, hurt the economy. Both he and Clinton be-

lieve, and both have proved, that a prudently managed economy, which wins the confidence of the business community, will yield higher tax revenues, and those revenues can be spent on creating new "opportunities"—Blair's favorite word again—for the poor. To ideologues of both the left and the right, this sounds like a fudge, and it may well be wishful thinking. (Clinton did raise taxes on the wealthy in 1993, which helped create the huge surpluses that suddenly appeared five years later.) But it is also the governing strategy used by almost all the current leaders of industrial democracies, whether they admit it or not. Even George W. Bush, in his rush to cut taxes, has acknowledged that his survival may depend on increasing "opportunities" for the poor through increased spending on education and faith-based social programs. When you get past the partisan ranting, Compassionate Conservatism and the Third Way aren't so very different. They both acknowledge what Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher did not: that the welfare state is here to stay, that government is going to have to provide, at the very least, education, pensions, and health care.

The Labour Party manifesto, felicitously entitled "Ambitions for Britain," seems an apotheosis of Third Way literature: the Blair Wish Project. It is, at once, foolish (Labour congratulates itself for producing twenty-eight thousand words of manifesto, compared with ten thousand for the Tories); fatuous (it posits ten astonishingly banal goals, such as economic stability, higher incomes, better health); prodigiously detailed (the Labour program is studded with specific goals, including some that might seem odd to American eyes: no more than one month's waiting period between the diagnosis and treatment of cancer—by the year 2005); and, beneath the blather, both responsible and courageous. Indeed, Labour takes a leap into the bureaucratic unknown which Bill Clinton never attempted: it says that the government will provide services in the most efficient way—through existing government offices or through private contractors. Britain's army of civil servants, an essential Labour constituency, will not be pleased. Nor will the traditional left, which believes that only higher taxes will produce better public services.

The left has a point. Britain spends

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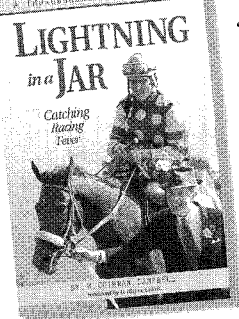


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less on health care than the rest of Western Europe, less even than the United States (about seven per cent of gross domestic product, as opposed to our fourteen per cent). But Blair has a point, too: the money is spent unwisely, swallowed up by vast, stultifying bureaucracies. "I think some of the Third Way stuff is interesting, but it is not a political philosophy," Matthew Taylor says. This is a serious problem for Blair: there is not much romance, or public interest, in good management. Clinton was able to transcend the problem by seeming larger than life, a public speaker who annually made a fairly pedestrian laundry list of proposals into the grand theatre of his State of the Union messages; his hungers and excesses were outrageous to some, but they were also a political weapon—they made everything he said seem more important. Like Clinton, Blair is a clever politician; unlike Clinton, he's not a very compelling one. The British public appears to agree, however vaguely, with his goals, but it doesn't seem particularly inspired by them.

The tilt toward privatization was meant to be the great innovation of this year's Blair campaign, the heart of the public debate. But the public hasn't noticed. "So far, the only two things that have made it through the press filter to my neighbors here," said Peter Mandelson, who is campaigning for reelection to Parliament from the safe County Durham district of Hartlepool, "are that we were endorsed by Geri Halliwell"—formerly of the Spice Girls, who were vehement Thatcherites—"and that John Prescott mixed it up with a voter."

There is no political advertising on British television, but the parties are allotted brief time slots to make their respective cases. Labour chose a Reaganesque "Morning in America" strategy for its first spot—film of happy families and inspirational music as the achievements of the past four years scrolled across the screen. The Tories were less pleasant. They resurrected Bush the Elder's Willie Horton strategy from the 1988 campaign: stark, staged footage of smiling criminals leaving prison as part of Labour's early-release policy and a recitation of the crimes they went on to commit, including two rapes.

The Tory spot was yet another reminder of the depressing universality of

Information Age politics, and its lurch toward triviality. George W. Bush, Al Gore, Tony Blair, and William Hague are all cut from the same constricted cloth, fashioned for them by consultants who are concerned with efficacy, not inspiration. The consultants tell the politicians how to give the public what it wants, not what it may need—governance has become a form of consumerism, not citizenship: you buy the party that seems to offer a better deal or better services. Even the issues—health, education, pensions—are pretty much the same, regardless of the country. There is no larger sense of public purpose. "Labour has dealt with the *how* of government, but not with the *why*," said Roderick Nye of the Conservatives (who have an easier—if ultimately futile—struggle with the "why" question, since they stand for the last vestiges of tradition and empire).

The absence of inspiration has had a subtle, deadening effect. Blair battles apathy and the press, rather than the Tories. A higher percentage of people vote in Britain than in the United States—about seventy per cent did in 1997—but the numbers have been dropping. I asked several of the younger New Labourites whether the technocratic tedium inherent in the Third Way—all those cautious promises, the rejiggerings of the bureaucratic process, all that rationality—was a potential problem. "We have set all our sticks out on the ground," said David Miliband, the Labour policy director. "But we haven't figured out how to rub them together and make fire yet."

The only fires in Britain this spring were the pyres of more than three million animals destroyed in the foot-and-mouth epidemic. I'd always wondered what the impact of a Biblical plague would be on a democracy. The answer in this campaign has been, remarkably, not much. Neither Hague nor Blair gave any prominence to the recent rural crisis during the week of campaigning that I witnessed. But the pyres may point the way to an essential question about the fire next time: Will it be a controlled blaze, stoked by statesmen—as both Matthew Taylor and David Miliband hope—to promote better citizenship? Or will it rage disastrously, perhaps globally, the consequence of public apathy and a politics that has asked too little and assumed too much? ♦

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AN ANTIDOTE TO "THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE"

BY ADAM LEHNER

The nuns whose sentences were grammatically complex and packed with ideas when they were in their 20s remained sharp of mind when they were in their 80s. In contrast, almost all those whose sentences were simple and comparatively devoid of complex grammatical constructions were demented six decades later. —*The Times*.

The reader of the fifth edition of "The Elements of Style" will find many of the rules changed from previous editions. The elementary principles have been modified as a result of the recent discovery that a talent for composing complicated prose early in life can stave off the onset of dementia or Alzheimer's later in life, or, at least, make it much more difficult to detect—a fact that writers can ignore no longer. Here are some of the new principles of composition:

1. Use "the fact that."

Healthy writing is unfocussed and blithering. A sentence should not be trimmed of unnecessary words, for the same reason that a fork should not be inserted into your forehead: self-preservation. "The fact that" is a particularly salubrious expression, and it and similar phrases should be introduced into a sentence whenever possible.

For example:

There is no doubt as to the question whether the fact that at eighty-three years of age Sister Marjorie can remember the incident involving Sister Jane as if it were yesterday is due to her florid manner of writing.

2. Employ fancy words.

The old notion that the paragraph should be the basic unit of composition, containing one central idea, has been deemed medically perilous. Having one or more ideas per word, on the other hand, maximizes the idea density of the writer's prose. And the fancier the words, the denser the prose. For-

eign words are best of all. If you are tickled by the following—

The dénouement of the impromptu pow-wow convened at the accouchement of Sister Jane was that, Deo volente, the nuns would be separated by a thick purdah from that handsome young horseman Dick at the next gymkhana—

you will have an easy time with No. 2.

3. Write with nouns and verbs and adjectives and adverbs and superlatives and vocatives and dangling participles and gerunds and nonrestrictive elements, lots of them, and split infinitives and possessive adjectives and prepositional idioms and interrogative adjectives and collective nouns and compound everythings and symbols such as # and @.

4. Express coördinate ideas in different form.

Parallel construction is a symptom of simplemindedness and can be risky. To be on the safe side, you should mix syntactical forms. For example, the beatitudes, familiar to all, would be

more therapeutic, though less familiar, if they were rendered like this:

Blessed are the verbose in spirit, for theirs shall be the kingdom of clarity; and the inheritance of the ability to name those children who sat beside them in third grade, and of the ability to name many animals, in a single minute, is what's coming to those who use complicated grammar.

5. Qualify.

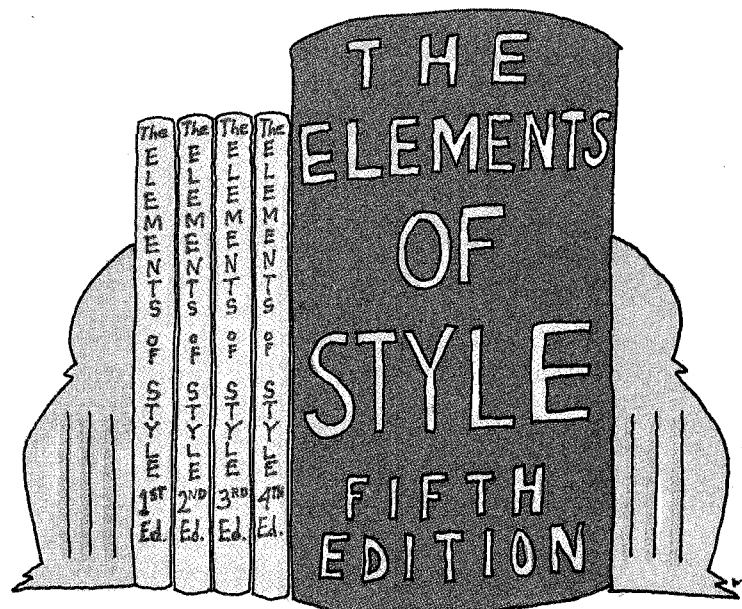
Qualifiers suggest equivocation, which indicates just the kind of complexity of thought that keeps Alzheimer's at bay. Especially healthful are the words "little" and "pretty":

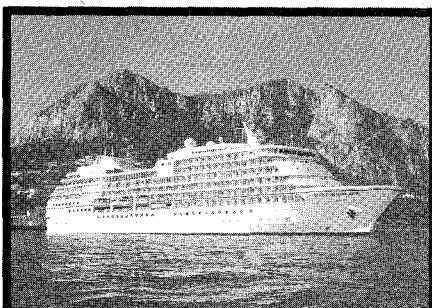
The Mother Superior tried a little harder to explain to the pretty disappointed (but not really that disappointed) Dick that Sister Jane, perhaps for her own good, had been sent kind of far away.

6. Do not underwrite.

Rich, ornate prose is hard to digest, fattening, and sometimes nauseating, but it is very, very good for you:

Recalling these incredibly regrettable but hopefully edifying incidents some six Order-oriented decades later, Sister Marjorie, adorned in damask, had occasion to consider a lifetime of convent memoranda and their effect, however inadvertent, on her ability to summon, in every excruciating detail, not only Sister Jane but myriad other little moments, too, including how the Mother Superior had fixed in an upright position a twelve-foot-high chain-link impediment, with razor wire along its rim, around the grounds, and how she had also installed, on the convent's perimeter, ill-tempered canines to chaperon the Sisters for the rest of their days. ♦





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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE SHOCK OF THE GOOD

Broadway's sweetheart sneaks spirituality into a sitcom.

BY JOHN LAHR

On a late blustery January afternoon last year, with the wind whipping snow flurries into their bowed faces, a cluster of some thirty theatricals hurried into Sardi's to witness the unveiling of the latest celebrity caricatures to be hung on the restaurant's cluttered red walls. Of all the totems of Broadway success—billing above the title, percentage of the gross, dressing room on the first floor—a place on the wall at Sardi's is perhaps the most emotive and the most symbolic, linking the initiate to a nearly century-long chain of great entertainers and to the glorious annals of show-biz joy. In recent years, owing to a steady decline in the number of quality shows and sensational entertainers, Sardi's has taken to adding the faces of producers to its tableau of prowess—a real blip in the vital signs of Broadway talent. On this occasion, however, the president of Sardi's, Max Klimavicius, was passing a Richard Baratz caricature into the hands of a star, the then thirty-one-year-old actress Kristin Chenoweth.

The drawing captured the diminutive Chenoweth's apple-pie exterior—the sweep of her shoulder-length blond hair, her wide forehead, almond-shaped cerulean-blue eyes, high cheekbones, and strong chin—but it showed little of her high-voltage interior, the warmth of which has won her a battalion of New York theatregoing admirers. In an earlier time, when Broadway was a leader in popular culture and not a follower, Chenoweth's singing voice, her high-pitched speech (which sounds as if she had just inhaled helium), her comic timing, and her aura of downright decency would have made her one of America's sweethearts. Instead, she's a local thrill, unknown to the hinterland. Chenoweth calls herself a “throwback,” and, in a sense, she's right. She's a God-fearing Baptist whose buoyancy is underpinned by the Bible's good news. Both her optimism and her talent are indicative of a

more innocent era of entertainment. She is Nellie Forbush in “South Pacific”—“as corny as Kansas in August” (though she's from Oklahoma) and as “bromidic and bright as a moon-happy night.” But Rodgers and Hammerstein created that character in 1949, when America still clung to the fantasy of its own purity. Chenoweth has come of age in the era of the corporate musical, and her persona has proved a problem. Though she has a two-and-a-half-octave range and can sing an E above high C—the vocal equivalent of a five-hundred-yard golf drive—she is too outspoken for the likes of Disney's fun machines. “If they want the plain vanilla ingénue, it ain't me,” she says. At the same time, she's too wholesome for the desiccated souls that Stephen Sondheim's boulevard nihilism has made the musical vogue. Each of her major Broadway shows has helped her career: she won a Theatre World Award in 1997 for her part in “Steel Pier,” although it was drastically cut; she won a Tony in 1999 for her performance as Sally Brown in “You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown”—a part written specifically to shoehorn her into an otherwise mediocre show; and later that year she got raves for her starring role in “Epic Proportions,” a woefully amateur send-up of a Hollywood Biblical epic. But none of these roles managed to bring her effectively from the periphery to the center of the story. In other words, Chenoweth on Broadway is a star with no place to glow.

Chenoweth attended Broken Arrow High School, in a comfortable middle-class suburb of Tulsa. Her family's house had a wooden fence and a swimming pool, and she drove—badly—a yellow Ford Mustang. In a section of her 1986 yearbook in which the class members imagined their futures—perhaps a doctor, perhaps a millionaire—Chenoweth is portrayed as “the famous singer she hopes to be.” “I always said, ‘I want to do Broadway,’” she says. “I didn't even know



Kristin Chenoweth with John Markus, a writer who thinks he has created the perfect role for her. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

what Broadway was, but I knew I'd be there." After completing a master's degree in opera performance at Oklahoma City University in 1993, and earning the title of "most promising newcomer" at a Metropolitan Opera audition that same year, Chenoweth won a scholarship to continue her studies at the Academy of Vocal Arts, in Philadelphia. On her way there, she stopped in New York and decided to audition for "Animal Crackers," a Marx Brothers musical—"just to see how I would do." "I sang. I read a scene. I learned a dance," she says. "They said they wanted to offer me the part. I told

them I was there for fun. They said, 'Who's your agent?' I said, 'My dad, I guess. I mean, I don't have one.' " Chenoweth adds, "I decided to go for it. The Academy of Vocal Arts really let me have it: 'Don't ever try to get back here again. You're making the biggest mistake of your life.' "

Five and a half years later, in a fitted brown pony-hair suit and a pale-blue blouse showing plenty of décolletage, Chenoweth scrutinized her likeness at Sardi's, then beamed at Klimavicius and the zealous admirers around her. "It's wonderful! Thank you," she said. "You

captured it so perfectly—my personality! Especially my hair"—a laugh bubbled up—"and my roots!" But, as she held the caricature up to her face like a mask and posed for the cameras, she couldn't help thinking that, despite her Tony, she was being elevated to Broadway's wall of fame without ever having had a hit show.

Leaning against the bar across the room was John Markus, a goateed forty-four-year-old TV writer, who was about two weeks away from completing the pilot script for a sitcom starring Chenoweth, and who was wondering, as

he watched her bask in the affection of her fans, whether he was doing the right thing. The news of Chenoweth's defection to the West Coast had already filtered out into the theatre world, and Broadway folk were eying Markus as if he were a carpetbagger and warning him to "take care of our girl." Markus knew the subtext of those warnings. He was about to drop Chenoweth into the middle of the Hollywood sump, and his mood was distinctly bittersweet: "I was taking her from the world that was celebrating her. I was telling myself I'd be doing her some good. She could come back after the series to better parts and bigger audiences."

That was the gamble—and it was a big one. Many current theatrical talents—Nathan Lane and Faith Prince among them—have tried and failed to make the transition from Broadway to TV. Too often, the material had nothing to do with the actor. The majority of recent successful sitcoms have been built around the well-developed and easily identifiable personalities of standup comedians such as Roseanne, Tim Allen, Ray Romano, and Jerry Seinfeld. But Markus was bullish about Chenoweth, and he believed he could provide her with a role that would make sense for

her, one that encompassed both her strong morals and her extravagant sense of humor—a role in which she could travel. "I made you a Cadillac," he announced when he handed her the first draft of the script.

Markus had begun his career in comedy as a teen-ager, in the early seventies, by sending jokes about life in a small town in Ohio to the syndicated New York columnist Earl Wilson; at nineteen, he flew to New York and waited eight hours for Bob Hope to walk through a hotel lobby so that he could hand him a few pages of his jokes—which Hope bought for five hundred dollars. By the time he was thirty, Markus had worked himself up to the position of head writer on "The Cosby Show." He wrote or co-wrote sixty-seven of the show's episodes, and by the time he left, six years later, his gift for writing successful character comedy had earned him both a reputation as a wunderkind and a percentage of "The Cosby Show"'s syndication. Markus then put in a season as a writer and consulting producer for "The Larry Sanders Show," and, with Al Franken, created and wrote "Lateline," a smart stab at media satire whose network life was blighted and

short. But he couldn't come up with anything on the scale of his early success. Having worked so hard to define the comic identity of Bill Cosby, Markus was now unable to define himself. "I had no reference points for the day," he says. "I was faced with me. I'm just not as much fun as a hit TV show." He spent five days a week in psychoanalysis—what he calls "the sport of kings." He took tutorials in the American novel. He studied guitar with the jazz master Bucky Pizzarelli. He spent more time with his wife, the painter Ardith Truhan, whom he'd married in 1997, after a sixteen-year courtship. He also began to buy property—using his "Cosby" proceeds to acquire eight hundred and fifty acres in upstate New York, a kingdom larger than Central Park, on which he built a computerized house where everything from the window blinds to the mattresses is adjustable at the touch of a button. Markus believes in property as an investment, and he has a knack for developing it. From his seat at the bar at Sardi's, he watched Chenoweth with the eye of an architect who has just discovered a magnificent new landscape on which to build.

Two years—almost to the day—before the Sardi's ceremony, Markus had been watching a videotape of performances by six actresses, in order to cast a pilot he'd written for NBC. Chenoweth was third on the tape, and he didn't bother with the last three. "There was a conviction in her performance," he told me. "That's what it was—a sense of commitment and truthfulness and this kind of powerful energy." He had her flown out to Burbank to test in front of the network executives. In the end, Chenoweth lost the part but gained an ally. "We just clicked," Markus says.

In Chenoweth, Markus recognized something of his own upbringing. Both were part of that huge, undramatized demographic that TV executives refer to as "the fly-over people." Markus's parents were Holocaust survivors, who, in 1953, had settled in London, Ohio (current population 8,771). Markus remembers going into the local café—the State Restaurant—and walking right into the kitchen, where the management let him cook his own meals. "Everything was



"Maybe the compassionate part will kick in during the second half of the Administration."

available—there was this great openness,” he told me. Chenoweth’s own openness, her lack of cynicism, and her vulnerability tapped a deep reservoir of nostalgia in him. In addition to an obsession with junk food (Markus has a life-size Bob’s Big Boy sculpture hidden in the woods of his estate) and a weakness for certain low styles of popular entertainment (Gogi Grant, the Lettermen), Markus and Chenoweth share a passion for flat landscapes “where you can see forever.” And Markus, who felt “maybe I’d lost my own way,” was moved by Chenoweth’s integrity and spiritual direction. Without knowing quite where it would lead him, he began to study her.

During the subsequent months, he trailed Chenoweth to a Baptist church in New York and to a Methodist church in Los Angeles. He visited her at home on the Upper West Side, and joined her for her first spa experience, in a de-luxe Berkshire enclave. A man who always knows where you can buy it for more, Markus found himself on excursions to Target, where Chenoweth likes to shop for clothes, ending each spree with a cherry slushie. He also attended her performances and was at the first screening of Disney’s “Annie,” in which she played the vamp Lily St. Regis.

In 1999, Chenoweth suddenly began getting calls from Hollywood executives. She had a half-dozen interviews, and, solely on the basis of having seen her sing and win at the Tony Awards, several network and studio panjandrums offered her a “holding deal”—a lucrative arrangement whereby the studio pays a performer not to take other work while it develops a show around her. At this point, Markus told me, he suddenly realized that “for the rest of my career I was probably never going to encounter a performer like this to write for, and, unless I came up with a vehicle to land her, I could eventually lose her.”

Until then, he had had “just a vague notion of the feel of a show” that would feature “a good woman in a world that was immoral.” Now he elaborated: in the show, as he imagined it, Chenoweth would play an aspiring actress named Kristin, who is forced to take temporary work with a charming but predatory real-estate mogul, and who must then struggle to remain true to both her

Christian faith and her talent. “This is a character who, day by day, lives by the following rules: she will not lie, she will not cheat, she will not break the law, she believes that marriage is a sacred vow, and she lives the way God asks her to live,” Markus explained. “In the obstacles to that goodness lies the humor.” Markus envisioned the sitcom as a radical departure from the caricature and sensationalism of the past few years of television—the jamboree of dysfunction (“Malcolm in the Middle,” “The Simpsons”) and the Machiavellian manipulation of reality-based shows like “Survivor.”

Like most stars, Chenoweth has a canny sense of what she’s selling, and she saw in Markus someone who both understood her talent and could advance her career. He himself was almost messianic on the subject. “John just never stopped,” the Paramount executive Dan Fauci says. “‘You gotta see Kristin. You gotta see Kristin.’ And he was right.” Markus sold Paramount on the idea, and then NBC. The show was about optimism, he told the NBC supremos. It was about innocence. It was about strength. Chenoweth, he explained, was a person with whom other fly-over people would identify. They got the idea so quickly that Markus stopped his pitch five minutes early, saying, “My work here is done.” But it was only just beginning. NBC ordered thirteen shows—at a total cost to the studio and the network of nearly fifteen million dollars—starring an actress whom most of the executives, and most of the nation, had never even seen perform.

Markus filled the first script with incidents from Chenoweth’s life. (“It’s eighty-seven per cent me,” she says.) Sometimes it’s a scene taken from her past, like the time she was unwittingly hired to deliver a malicious singing telegram—and performed “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feelin’” for a man who’d just had a vasectomy and who broke down and wept on hearing it. Sometimes it’s dialogue, like her comeback to a married man who tried to kiss her: “There’s a wedding ring on your finger, Mister. Somewhere you have a wife who’s counting on me not to kiss back.” Markus recalls, “I was once sitting with her in a situation where she had to tell a white lie. She was on the phone. She

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screwed up her courage and told the lie, but before she did it she crossed her fingers. 'Why are you looking at me?' she asked when she hung up. I said, 'I saw something I'm putting in the show.'

I caught up with Markus and Chenoweth in April of last year, on a crystalline Los Angeles afternoon, at their production office on the Paramount lot. With the Venetian blinds partly closed against the sun's glare, they were readying the first script to "go to table" (a read-through for the network). They made an amusing study in contrasts. Issuing an endless series of orders to his assistants next door, inspecting props for the set being built across the way, taking calls from agents and actors, Markus was the commander-in-chief, in a khaki shirt, shorts, and sandals. Chenoweth, in open-toed shoes and black pedal pushers, moved around the room like some playful promise of good times. She flopped onto a sofa and draped herself over the armrest to cue up a demo for the show's theme song. Since the song, "Hold On," was the work of Jeanine Tesori and Dick Scanlan, the erstwhile writers of the stage adaptation of "Thoroughly Modern Millie" (which Chenoweth had abandoned in order to make the series), and since it was Chenoweth's voice on the demo, it seemed like a done deal—as, indeed, it proved to be. "Hold on / Hold on / Hold on to who you are," Chenoweth sang.

Another TV-comedy pro, Earl Pomerantz, whom Markus had enlisted to help him punch up the script, wandered in to listen. "I like the lyrics," he said. "I like the idea of it. But I don't know if Jews will listen if they put that on." "Do Jews have Nielsen boxes?" Markus asked. "I dunno," Pomerantz said with a shrug. The talk turned to the show's title. "There's a hundred-dollar reward for whoever comes up with the right name," Chenoweth said. She was pushing for "The Real Deal." Paramount had hired a company to suggest titles, and it had produced "The Perfect Pair," "Heaven Sent," and "Naughty and Nice," among others. But the title that most confounded Markus was "Cross to Bear." "Why would you want to summon up the image of Jesus at his lowest moment in selling your show?" he said. Then there were the joke titles that were constantly being submitted, like "No Sex and the City" and "Touched by a

THINGS SHOULDN'T BE SO HARD

A life should leave
deep tracks:
ruts where she
went out and back
to get the mail
or move the hose
around the yard;
where she used to
stand before the sink,
a worn-out place;
beneath her hand,
the china knobs
rubbed down to
white pastilles;
the switch she
used to feel for

in the dark
almost erased.
Her things should
keep her marks.
The passage
of a life should show;
it should abrade.
And when life stops,
a certain space
—however small—
should be left scarred
by the grand and
damaging parade.
Things shouldn't
be so hard.

—Kay Ryan

Short Person"—an allusion to "Touched by an Angel," the hour-long sentimental spiritual drama to which Markus imagines his show will be an antidote. "I felt that the star of our show might find it a little difficult, week to week," he said of this last title. "Just a hair," the star responded.

Chenoweth is four feet eleven, and "the size thing," as she calls it, is not always a joke for her. At her first anxious meeting with Paramount executives, she was offered a seat on a large leather couch. "Her feet didn't touch the ground; she kept sliding off and, trying to maintain her poise, hoisting herself back up," Markus recalls. "You will see that exact moment in the show." Size has been a defining issue in Chenoweth's life, and, to some extent, it accounts for the particular intensity of her talent. Her size cost her a career as a ballet dancer after fifteen years of training, and it got her pushed around in the halls of Broken Arrow High School. People seem to have an overwhelming urge to lift Chenoweth up, and, throughout her childhood, shopping malls during holiday season were an emotional minefield. "The Easter Bunny or Santa Claus—one of those people—had a tendency to yell at me, 'Come over here, little girl!'" she says. "They'd follow me in the mall. And I'm like, 'Go away. I'm sixteen.'" She adds, "Now when I see them it brings back that horrible, horrifying time. And my mom loved to tease me. She'd go, 'There's

Santa! There's Santa!'" ("To this day, if she sees a clown coming she'll turn and walk away for fear he might give her a balloon," Junie Chenoweth says of her daughter.)

Onstage, the combination of small body and big personality only adds to Chenoweth's allure. But offstage, when she is patronized because of her size, a certain militancy shows through her geniality. During a recent Christmas-shopping expedition to H. Stern to buy pearls for her mother, Chenoweth, whose head was barely higher than the display cases, found herself first being overlooked, then treated rudely by a saleswoman named Cynthia. Chenoweth recalls, "I said, 'You're unhappy, aren't you? You're an unhappy person because you're working at Stern's. You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna pray for you right now. I'm really gonna pray.'" Chenoweth bowed her head. "Dear Lord, help Cynthia," she said. "She is so unhappy here at Stern's. And I mean it, because I am trying, Lord, to have a patient heart with her, and it is not working. She is so nasty." Chenoweth could hear the women around her laughing. She continued, "God help me right now to be patient. I know, we all know, that I need help with this situation. Amen."

Part of Chenoweth's cheer springs from her ability to turn aggression back onto its perpetrator. Not long ago at an audition, a Broadway star came up to her and gushed about her performance in

"Charlie Brown." Afterward, while Chenoweth was in a stall in the ladies' room, she overheard the star talking to another woman. "I mean, she can sing—I'll give her that," the star said. "But funny? How hard is it to play a cartoon. I don't get all the hoopla!" Chenoweth realized that they were talking about her. "I just sat in the stall and I was, like, God, help me to handle this with class." Chenoweth walked out of the stall and up to the sink. The actress's face drained of color. Chenoweth washed her hands, and as she left she turned back to the actress. "I don't get the hoopla, either," she said.

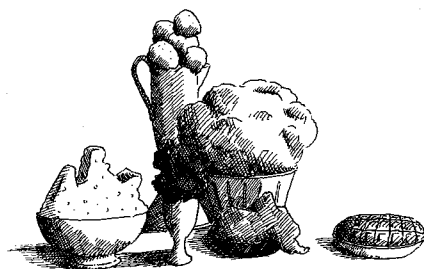
Chenoweth's one "diva moment"—the only time she actually raised what people call her "Kewpie-doll voice"—is what got her to Paramount. At the 1999 Tony Awards, she was scheduled to sing "My New Philosophy" dressed as Sally Brown, right before the prize for which she had been nominated would be announced. She asked for a change in the schedule so that, if she won, she would have time to put on her regular clothes before collecting the award. "I'd like the world to see me win as myself, not looking like a ten-year-old," she told the show's producers. "They fought me and fought me on it," Chenoweth says. Then, two days before the awards, she was a guest on "The Rosie O'Donnell Show" and mentioned her distress to O'Donnell, who happened to be a former m.c. of the Tony Awards. "Rosie made the call," Chenoweth says. On the night of the Awards, five dressers were waiting for Chenoweth when she came offstage; they had just seconds to get her out of her costume and into her gown. A zipper got stuck, and the dressers literally had to rip the costume off her. Nonetheless, nine million viewers saw a focussed, adult-looking Chenoweth stride from the wings to receive her award.

As they tweak scenes for the pilot, Markus and Chenoweth sometimes act them out. In one, Kristin's boss, the full-time tycoon and part-time Casanova Tommy Ballantine, interviews Kristin for the job as his personal assistant. He dictates a list of chores: "First, call my veterinarian. Tell him the flea dip didn't take. My cat is still infested, only now he smells like dry cleaning. I want my cat picked up, re-dipped, de-Martinized, and returned at his expense." Chenoweth's

forehead wrinkles in concentration as she mimes writing on a notepad. "Fix cat," she says. "Oops! I mean, fix cat *problem*. Whoa. Better add that last word! Like the difference between lightning and lightning bug!" Chenoweth puts a little down-home Oklahoma spin on the word "bug" that makes Markus light up.

All games are best when they are tense, and Markus has set up a shrewdly comic battle of wills between the righteous Kristin and the sensationally pagan Tommy ("If you're a woman and you're breathing, you're in Tommyworld"). Markus's innovation is not so much in the sitcom form as in its content. By making Kristin the heroine of the show, he brings to center stage the kind of character—a moral, conservative person—who has traditionally been relegated to a stock secondary role, such as the uptight neighbor. "I'm having the same feelings that I had on 'The Cosby Show,'" Markus says. "We're taking a character American television viewers don't normally see as accessible and turning her into an Everyperson."

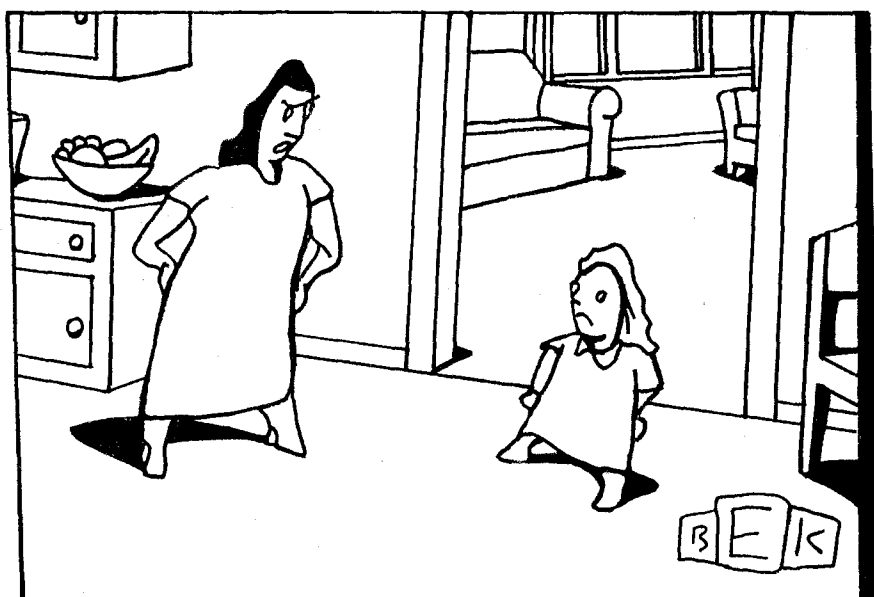
In the show, Markus dramatizes the very contemporary struggle between selfishness and selflessness, a struggle that is also, in a sense, personal to Chenoweth, who has difficulty finding a balance between the self-interest required to promote her talent and the self-sacrifice that relationships with others often demand. In a telling scene that has since been cut from the pilot, Chenoweth is shown in a church, sitting in front of a black woman, who soon draws her into conversation: "What's your problem? You're white." "All I'm asking is that God give me the chance to show off the talents he gave me," Kristin explains. The woman says, "Hey, I'm prayin' for a kidney." "Oh," Kristin says, casting her eyes heavenward. "Do hers first." Last year, Chenoweth broke off a three-year engagement, and she admits that she's "never really been good at picking men." She prays over the problem; she has also ventured into psychotherapy



to address it. "She's always saying, 'Am I that difficult? Am I asking too much?'" her friend Denny Downs told me. "She's always dated someone who's either Jewish or in another denomination that's clashed with her own. Those are the men she's drawn to. I think that puzzles her."

Markus believes that he has helped Chenoweth to take the same kinds of risks in life that she takes onstage. For his part, he has been inspired by the depth of her beliefs. He finds that he's more tolerant than he used to be. "I don't categorize people as zealots so easily," he says. Sometimes he, like Tommy Ballantine, feels like a spiritual work-in-progress, a kind of "trifecta of sin"—to borrow a line from the show—and he often teases Chenoweth about her secret hope that he'll convert to Christianity one day. "I have a family that went through the Holocaust," Markus says. "It gives me a certain, shall we say, skepticism about the existence of goodness, of God." But, he adds, "During the course of working with Kristin, I went from being an agnostic to being really open to her faith." Often, Markus will get her to talk about the Rapture. "I go, 'Now, what's gonna happen when the Rapture comes?' She says, 'We'll be sitting here, and then suddenly I'll be gone. All that will be left is my jewelry.' Then I say, 'Kristin, let me tell you something. If the time comes when I'm sitting here, eating meat loaf with you, and you disappear and all that's left is your jewelry, I guarantee you that I will accept Jesus as my personal Savior.'"

To pass the desultory hours of one late afternoon, while Markus sifted through scripts Chenoweth turned her focus to two albums that she planned to record for Sony Classical, which had signed her up after she sang in the Encores! production of "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever." On the first album, "Let Yourself Go," Chenoweth was going to sing mostly standards from the American songbook, but the company had sent her a skimpy list of possible numbers, and we found ourselves cruising the aisles of Tower Records on Sunset Boulevard at twilight, looking for fresher material, like Lena Horne's rendition of "A New-Fangled Tango" and versions of a song that Chenoweth had never heard of—Rodgers and Hart's "Mountain Greenery." Chenoweth is no



"What did I tell you about destroying Mommy's inner balance?"

stranger to this kind of professional blind spot, and she tells a story about the interview portion of a Miss Oklahoma beauty pageant she once entered. After being briefed about current events and politics, she nervously took a seat in front of her interrogator. The question she was asked was "What do you think of '60 Minutes' as a TV show?" "Well, you know, I think sixty minutes is long enough," she said. "That's a reasonable amount of time." She paused. "That's not what you wanted to know, is it?"

As we picked through the CDs looking for "Right as the Rain," by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg, Chenoweth came upon Karen Carpenter's recordings. "One of my favorite singers," she said. "There's some deep pain in her voice that you can hear in everything she does. To me, it's more than just good technique. The one thing I don't want to do is sing a song because it's pretty. I want it to tell a story. I want people to be transformed by the song." Like all genuine stage stars, Chenoweth has an uncanny connection to the audience. "Kristin can take the pulse of an audience in the way that Judy Garland could," the director Michael Mayer told me. Chenoweth first recognized this chemistry at the age of twelve: "I can remember singing for ten thousand Baptists at a convention and thinking, I have these people; they're with me." The Chenoweths have a large

extended family, and, according to Junie Chenoweth, adults were always cajoling Kristin to "sing for us, or dance for us." She was always "a different person when the audience responded to her." Chenoweth's older brother Mark, who is an engineer in Colorado, adds, "It was easy for her to be the center of attention anywhere. She made it a point to make other people know that she recognized them."

Despite Chenoweth's love of attention, she was somewhat taken aback to discover, a few days before shooting the pilot in late April of last year, that the show was officially to be known as "Kristin." Markus says, "She turned to me, pointed to her shoulders, and said, 'Why don't you just put fifteen million dollars right up here?'" Finding an actor with the right combination of charm and chutzpah to play opposite Chenoweth was a difficult task, and the long, frustrating search had finally come to an end in the last week of March, when Markus chose Jon Tenney, a TV regular with a Broadway pedigree in light comedy ("Biloxi Blues," "Brighton Beach Memoirs"). On the day the network accepted Tenney, he, Chenoweth, Markus, and the casting director were driving off the NBC lot when Markus found himself at the wrong exit gate. The barrier arm wouldn't go up. As they sat momentarily stymied, Chenoweth said, "I'd really like to take a

moment here." With head bowed, she said a prayer of thanks for getting to work with Tenney and Markus. When she'd finished, Markus turned to her. "Could you ask God to open the gate?" he said.

Over the next few weeks, Markus called me occasionally with progress reports. The first episodes of the show had tested in the "good" to "very good" range. "But what I've learned is that testing rewards the familiar," Markus said. "'Seinfeld' did not test well. 'All in the Family' did not test well. 'Mary Tyler Moore' did not test well." Still, the tests showed that the viewers united in their enthusiasm only at the moment, five minutes into the show, when Kristin showed up for work at Tommy's office. Accordingly, Markus restructured and reshot the opening. The network had announced that the show would premiere in September, and as it got tighter and better Markus's obsession with it grew. Late one night, he called me from the editing room. He sounded exhausted. He went into a monologue about the industrial designer Raymond Loewy. Loewy, it seems, had been hired to design a car that would reinvigorate sales of the Studebaker. "He brought a group of men to his compound and denied them women," Markus said. "Women. Phones. Alcohol. Contact with the outside world. All their energy was sublimated into this new car and giving it some kind of excitement that they weren't being allowed to have in life." He added, "They created a classic."

On May 15th, Markus, Chenoweth, and Tenney rolled up to Lincoln Center, where a banner across the front of the Metropolitan Opera announced "NBC Primetime 2000/2001." The network was preparing for its seasonal ratings war, and the "Kristin" team members were part of its shock troops—there to participate in a promotional extravaganza for three thousand pumped-up advertisers and reporters. But they were feeling a little as if they had just pulled K.P. A week earlier, the show's debut had been bumped from the fall lineup. Chenoweth was upset, but as they milled among the other talent for the new season—Michael Richards, David Alan Grier, Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, Oliver Platt—the reason became clear. "They can't put us into that pack," Markus said. "We have people who re-

ally aren't known at all to television viewers. It would be a higher risk to do that." When Chenoweth and Tenney were summoned for the show's grand finale—"The Parade of Stars"—Markus stayed behind, watching his stars on the monitor as they trooped out, as far from center stage as they could be while still being part of the parade, waving and applauding the audience, which applauded them, too. When Chenoweth reemerged from her walk-on, a journalist approached her and asked how it felt to have her show cut from the fall schedule. "You know, I've always had really good luck sneaking in the back door," she said.

But NBC's door proved hard to pry open. In December, the president of the network's entertainment division, Garth Ancier, gave Markus a premiere date of March 12, 2001. Soon afterward, Ancier was deposed, the premiere date disappeared with him, and "Kristin" found itself in programming purdah. Last January, Markus, Chenoweth, and the creative team presented some episodes of the show at the biannual Television Critics Association Press Tour, in Pasadena. "We did great, especially when I had Kristin sing I'm Only Four Eleven, but I'm Going to Heaven, and That Makes Me Feel Ten Feet Tall," Markus says. "But what we didn't have for the critics was an air date." The networks are currently under pressure to air their own product, and NBC is no exception. The entertainment division's new president, Jeff Zucker, chose to try out three NBC-owned sitcoms ("Three Sisters," "The Fighting Fitzgeralds," and "The Weber Show") before giving the nod to the Paramount-owned "Kristin," which will premiere on Tuesday, June 5th, at 8:30 P.M. between reruns of "Frasier." The placement "is a way to protect an unusual show that may need nurturing, and ours does," Markus explains, citing "Seinfeld" and "Northern Exposure" as successful past examples of this summer strategy.

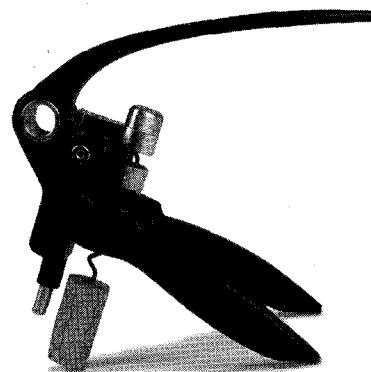
In the long, tense, and enervating waiting period before NBC announced the show's start date, Markus went back to his country estate; he tapped maple trees for syrup, busied himself with a screenplay, and worked the telephones trying to chivy the network. Chenoweth grew petulant; in order to get the network's attention and prove that she was a desirable property, she auditioned and

ultimately signed on in second position (which meant that she could take the part only if her own show failed) for a supporting role in "Seven Roses," another Paramount-developed sitcom, starring Brenda Blethyn. Although Chenoweth takes credit for lighting a fire under NBC—"All I know is that soon after I got the part we got an air date," she says—she didn't do herself or "Kristin" any favors on the publicity front. The press misinterpreted her signing with "Seven Roses" (the filming of which has now been postponed owing to casting problems) as a sign of defection; to them, she was abandoning the good ship "Kristin" before it had even left port. "When a show is on the shelf, delays foster rumors," Markus says. "Why is it not on? Is it not good? Does the new president not like it?" The delay tested not only the show but also the Markus-Chenoweth friendship—and the notion of goodness that "Kristin" was designed to showcase. For a time, the two didn't speak. While Chenoweth claims to love TV, and "the challenge of a new script every week," in the same breath she admits to having second thoughts: "I do miss the theatre a lot. I miss the people, I miss the flat-out thrill of being onstage. I'm very conflicted inside."

Now that "Kristin"'s air date has been confirmed, most of those conflicts have been resolved, and Markus and Chenoweth have rekindled the friendship and lightheartedness that I witnessed last October when their show was well into production and its star had been ensconced in a personalized pink-and-pine dressing room. By then, Markus had found nine writers, five of them women, who were working on enough plot lines to put Kristin's goodness and Tommy's sexual prowess to the test for a season or so. Best of all, Chenoweth was feeling funny. "She had some shimmering moments," Markus told me. "Somebody came over to me the other day and whispered, 'Just like Lucy.'" Markus chuckled to himself at the memory of the scene; in it, a bitchy Latina real-estate agent called Santa (played by Ana Ortiz), who works and sometimes sleeps with Tommy, arranges for Kristin "to get a massage with a happy ending." "No nudity, but she had to fake an orgasm," Markus said. "She gave it to us four different ways." ♦

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THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR

Have we been fighting cancer the wrong way?

BY JEROME GROOPMAN

To judge from recent headlines, we are on the verge of conquering cancer. The feature story in last week's issue of *Barron's*, entitled "Investing in Health: Curing Cancer," ended by saying that "we are finally winning the war," and predicted that for our children cancer will be just another chronic illness, for which they will simply "pop a few pills every day." The cover of the May 28th issue of *Time* read, "There Is New Ammunition in the War Against Cancer. These Are the Bullets," and Dr. Michael Gordon, an oncologist at the University of Arizona, told *Time* reporters that in 20 years or so he "might just be out of a job." The annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, earlier this month, was buoyed by a spirit of optimism, and in the days that followed there was a sharp rise in the share prices of biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies that are developing cancer drugs. Meanwhile, Senator Dianne Feinstein, of Cal-

ifornia, has constituted a committee under the auspices of the American Cancer Society to consider how the government should respond to the challenges of cancer in the new millennium.

Important advances have been made in oncology in recent years, and the current atmosphere of hope is not without foundation. But it is not without precedent, either: ever since 1971, when President Nixon declared war on cancer, oncologists and cancer patients have been caught in a cycle of euphoria and despair as the prospect of new treatments has given way to their sober realities. The war on cancer turned out to be profoundly misconceived—both in its rhetoric and in its execution.

The most ambitious health initiative ever undertaken by a country on behalf of its citizens began not with scientists, physicians, politicians, or patients but with a middle-aged New Yorker

named Mary Lasker. Born in Wisconsin and educated at Radcliffe, Lasker had achieved great success in the fashion industry; her husband, Albert, had made a fortune in advertising. After the Laskers retired, they devoted themselves to Democratic Party politics and health-care issues. Mary Lasker was the quintessential American idealist; she believed that with enough money, influence, energy, and conviction you could accomplish anything. Then, in 1950, Albert Lasker developed intestinal cancer.

For the first half of the twentieth century, cancer was mainly the province of surgeons. Small tumors that had not spread were cut out, along with large amounts of normal tissue, in an attempt to catch any stray malignant cells. Still, microscopic deposits of cancer often remained, and patients were given radiation treatments, intended to destroy the residual cells. A few chemotherapy drugs were used as well, some of them



LORENZO MATTOTTI

In 1971, the United States government resolved to find a cure for the disease in a congressional act that was signed into law by Richard

derived from mustard gas, which had been used in the First World War. These treatments were highly toxic but seemed to shrink the cancer, at least temporarily, in patients with diseases such as Hodgkin's lymphoma. But for the vast majority of patients whose cancers had metastasized, or spread beyond the initial site, there was little that could be done.

Lasker had surgery, which did not completely remove the tumor. Intestinal cancer spreads within the abdomen, destroying the liver and often causing great pain. After two years of unsuccessful treatment, Lasker died, and his wife—using her network of political, medical, and business contacts, the advertising savvy that he had embodied, and the considerable resources from his estate—set out to transform the nation's response to the disease that had killed him.

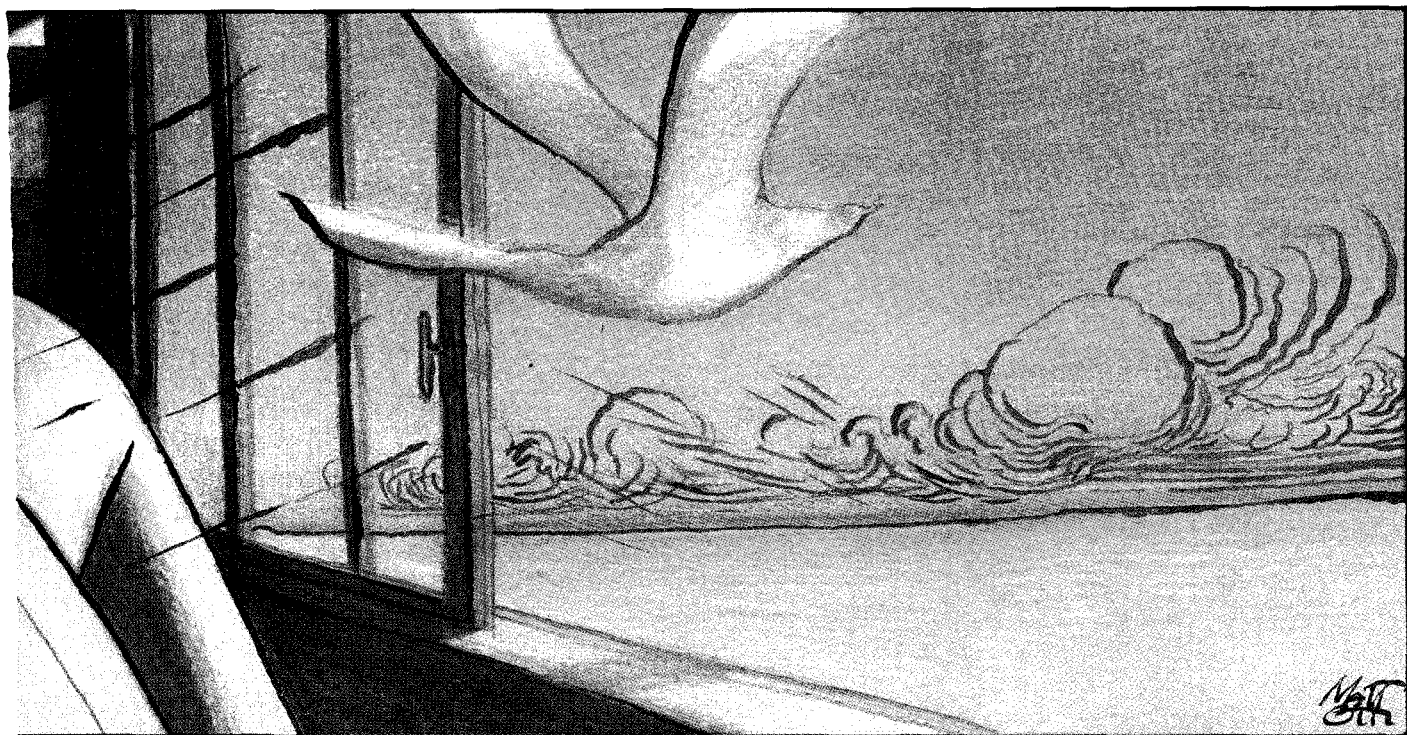
The Laskers had been major contributors to the American Cancer Society, but after her husband's death Mary Lasker came to believe that only the government had the financial and organizational resources to launch a full-fledged crusade against cancer. In order to gain greater credibility in Washington, she cultivated relationships with high-profile academic physicians, most notably Sidney Farber, the scientific director of the Children's Cancer Research

Foundation, in Boston. In the late forties, Farber had discovered that chemotherapeutic drugs that blocked folic acid, an essential vitamin, brought about remissions in some children with acute leukemia. His success in fighting this devastating pediatric cancer made him a frequent "citizen witness," invited by Congress to testify on behalf of medical legislation. Farber believed that, if the right drugs were developed, the gains he had seen in children with leukemia could be reproduced and improved upon. Lasker was also impressed by "Cure for Cancer: A National Goal" (1968), a book by a Denver physician named Solomon Garb, who asserted that cancer cures could emerge quickly if scientists stopped searching for new answers and devoted themselves instead to aggressively exploiting existing knowledge.

By the late sixties, however, the governmental largesse that had characterized Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs had run its course; Nixon was determined to fight inflation, and Congress was under pressure to hold down domestic spending. To overcome this resistance, Mary Lasker organized the first major grass-roots cancer-advocacy group, the Citizens Committee for the Conquest of Cancer. On December 9, 1969, it began a campaign to make eradication of the disease a federal responsi-

bility, running a full-page advertisement in the *Times* that declared, "Mr. Nixon: you can cure cancer." If American determination and ingenuity had put a man on the moon just months before, why shouldn't the nation attempt to conquer cancer by America's two-hundredth birthday? This political gambit quickly gained momentum. By the end of the following summer, both the Senate and the House of Representatives had unanimously passed a resolution to cure cancer by the Bicentennial.

In the ensuing debates over how this was to be accomplished, Farber argued before the House health subcommittee that researchers did not need to fully understand the workings of cancer in order to proceed: "The 325,000 patients with cancer who are going to die this year cannot wait; nor is it necessary, in order to make great progress in the cure of cancer, for us to have the full solution of all the problems of basic research." He pointed out that vaccination, digitalis, and aspirin were unquestionably beneficial, even if doctors didn't know exactly how they functioned: "The history of medicine is replete with examples of cures obtained years, decades, and even centuries before the mechanism of action was understood for these cures." What was needed, he maintained, was a generously funded cancer institute with



Nixon. The war on cancer has been generating cycles of euphoria and disappointment among patients and doctors ever since.

strong leadership and a clearly articulated battle plan.

Richard A. Rettig points out, in his book "Cancer Crusade" (1977), that Farber's view was not universally accepted. Some scientists argued that a cure for cancer could not come about by directive. One such dissenter was a colleague of Farber's at Harvard, Dr. Francis Moore, the surgeon-in-chief at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. Moore, a medical-history buff, invoked what might be called the law of unintended consequences in scientific discovery. If there had been a diabetes institute in the late nineteenth century, for example, it would not have funded Langerhans's research on the pancreas, which led to the discovery of insulin, because the link between diabetes and insulin was not recognized at that time. Similarly, a government institute on polio probably wouldn't have supported the work of Dr. John Enders in the late nineteen-forties, when he was attempting to grow the mumps virus and found the method that ultimately proved essential to producing the polio vaccine. Advances had occurred in medical research, Moore argued, because support had gone to creative researchers in universities, "often young people, often unheard-of people." In fact, he could not recall a single example of a scientific breakthrough of clinical importance which had come

from the sort of directed funding that was now being proposed.

Farber dismissed such critics, saying that they were not "cancer people," and were therefore ignorant of the possibilities at hand. Congressmen who expressed doubts about the wisdom of rapidly spending vast sums of money in response to what was essentially anecdotal testimony became targets of the Citizens Committee. They received hundreds of thousands of pleading letters, and committee members threatened to work against their reelection if they didn't reconsider their position.

Lasker also persuaded Congress to convene a panel of experts, with Sidney Farber as the co-chairman, which laid out the battle plan for the war against cancer. The President would henceforth appoint the director of the National Cancer Institute, and the institute's budget would be submitted directly to the White House, bypassing the regular channels of the National Institutes of Health. In December, 1971, Congress passed the National Cancer Act, and Nixon signed it into law less than two weeks afterward. At a ceremony that made front-page headlines in newspapers across the country, Nixon declared, "This legislation—perhaps more than any legislation I have signed as President of the United States—can mean new hope and comfort in the years ahead for millions of people

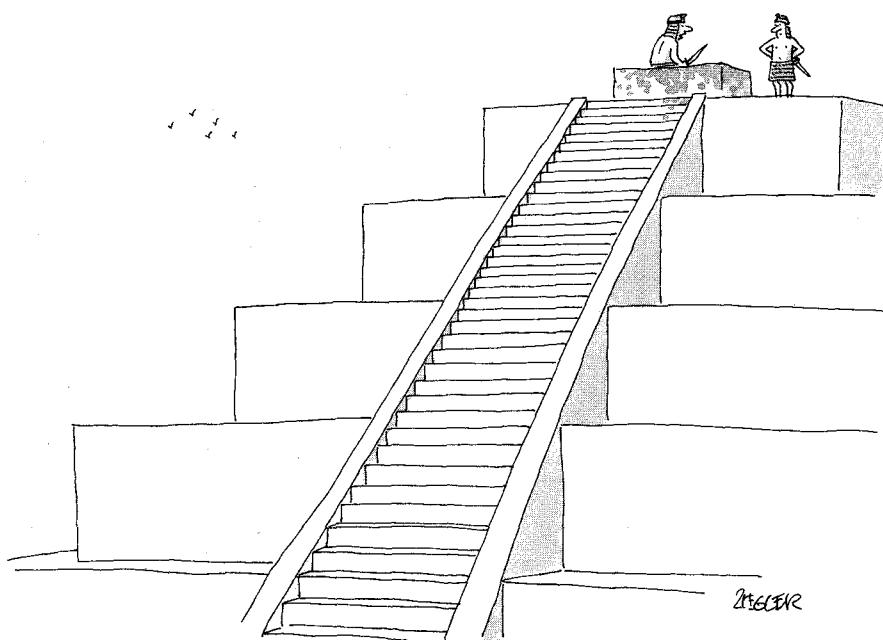
in this country and around the world."

Three decades later, the high expectations of the early seventies seem almost willfully naïve. This year alone, more than a million new diagnoses of major cancers will be made and about five hundred and fifty thousand Americans will die of cancer, an average of fifteen hundred a day. In the course of a lifetime, one of every three American women will develop a potentially fatal malignancy. For men, the odds are one in two. All the same, the triumphalist rhetoric that animated the war on cancer still shapes public opinion: many people believe that cancer is, in essence, a single foe, that a single cure can destroy it, and that the government is both responsible for and capable of spearheading the campaign. The military metaphors have retained their potency—even though they have proved to be inappropriate and misleading.

In the early nineteen-seventies, many researchers believed that a cancer was generally caused by a virus that triggered important changes in a cell's metabolism, and that these changes accounted for a tumor's uncontrolled growth. Abnormalities in the genes of the cancer cell were thought to be incidental, rather than fundamental, to the disease.

The virus hypothesis was plausible because there were some hundred viruses that were known to cause cancer in amphibians, birds, and mammals. These were so-called retroviruses—RNA viruses that made their way into normal animal cells, copied their genes into a DNA form, and then subverted the ordinary functions of the cells for their own reproduction. The origin of most human cancers, the experts contended, would prove to be retroviruses as well, and hundreds of millions of dollars were poured into research to prove this assumption.

Sidney Farber's panel didn't just set the government's bureaucratic approach to cancer; it also dictated the National Cancer Institute's scientific agenda in research and clinical testing. The N.C.I. awarded contracts to refine systems for growing cancer cells in bulk, and for producing enzymes that cut and copied DNA and RNA so that the nucleus of the cancer cell could be dissected and the hidden human cancer viruses ex-



*"What I'd like to know is what the hell happened
to all the virgins in this town."*

posed. Hundreds of thousands of botanical extracts and chemical poisons were systematically screened against different cancer cells to find the next generation of curative drugs. To test these new drugs, the N.C.I. utilized a vast clinical-trials network of "coöperative groups," which were organized with the help of fifteen new cancer centers across the nation. The N.C.I. also designated funding to train young physicians to become oncologists, the specialists who would prescribe the new drugs.

The N.C.I. clinical-trials network employed three phases of testing new drugs. Phase I sought to determine the toxicity of the treatment and the maximum dose that patients could tolerate. Phase II assessed whether the therapy was of any benefit, and what doses of the drug and schedule of treatment seemed to work; it also established objective standards to measure success rates. Phase III studies compared the safety and benefits of the treatment under review with standard therapies. If the results were conclusively favorable, then the therapy would be submitted to the F.D.A. for approval.

Within two years, the war on cancer was well under way, but the miraculous cures failed to appear. Many of the new chemotherapeutic drugs proved to be so toxic that they were quickly abandoned. In the absence of effective single agents, doctors began using combinations of less effective drugs, given at the highest dose a patient could tolerate. At the same time, the clinical-trials network had to justify its existence. Dr. Vincent DeVita, a prominent cancer specialist and a former director of the N.C.I., who is now the head of the Yale Cancer Center, recalls his frustration with the N.C.I. when he was working there in the seventies, before he became the director. His research group developed a treatment regimen for an aggressive form of cancer called large-cell lymphoma, using a combination of chemotherapy drugs. In 1975, about forty-one per cent of the patients with this lymphoma were cured using DeVita's regimen. The N.C.I. proceeded to compare the therapy with four similar treatments. "I screamed my head off, saying, 'You are all crazy! None of these regimens is good enough to merit being tested against another,'" DeVita recalled. "You will wrap up all the

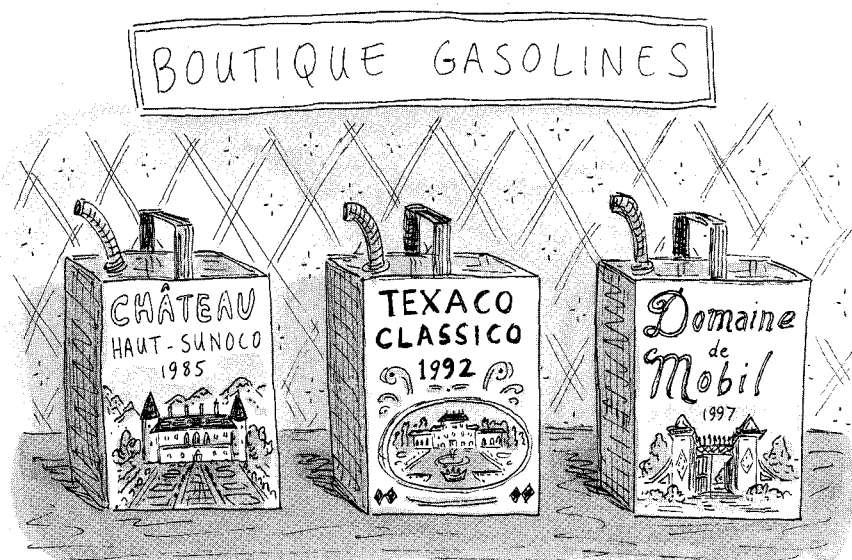


lymphoma research in this country. It will cost five million dollars, and in the end it will show that the treatment we started with is as good as but no better than any of the others.' "And this, indeed, was the result. The need to justify the bureaucracy meant that scores of clinical trials of relatively ineffective but toxic drugs were conducted with little benefit to the patient or to science.

The same year that Nixon signed the National Cancer Act, my grandmother Rose, an energetic sixty-seven-year-old Bronx homemaker, fell ill. She experienced frequent bouts of exhaustion, her lower back ached, and mysterious bruises began to appear on her arms and legs. A blood test showed that her white-blood-cell count was extremely high, and that many of the cells were abnormally large and immature. My grandmother had chronic myelogenous leukemia, or CML, a cancer of the bone-marrow stem cells. Malignant white cells grow uncontrollably, filling the marrow and flooding the bloodstream. The ache in my grandmother's back came from this expanding mass of leukemia pressing within her bones. Her exhaustion was caused by severe anemia, and the depletion of platelets in her blood was preventing it from clotting normally.

The prognosis for leukemia patients was grim, but my family was extremely hopeful; my grandmother's doctors told us that scientists were close to identifying human cancer viruses, and that new treatments would soon be available. Building on the logic of cancer as an infectious disease, researchers thought that, if the body could somehow be made to recognize the cancer cell as aberrant, its immune system would attack the tumor; by injecting the cancer patient with extracts of microbes, they hoped to jump-start that immune response.

After two years of standard chemotherapy, when my grandmother's condition began to deteriorate once more, a specialist recommended moving her to the front lines of immune therapy. She was enrolled in an experimental trial that used an immune booster called MER (methanol-extracted residue), a preparation from tuberculosis-like bacilli. This extract was injected under the skin of her back. Each injection was meant to cause severe inflammation, thereby stimulating her immune system to attack the cancer. I was a medical student at the time, and I remember examining her after the treatments. Her back was studded with raised welts, the size of silver dollars, that ran parallel to her spine. When I touched them, they felt hot and



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R. C. W.

she winced in pain. Nevertheless, Rose resolutely kept every weekly appointment and received every injection. "I'm going to lick this," she said to my mother after each treatment. "They didn't give me a placebo. I'm lucky. I'm getting the cure."

After nearly a year, it was clear that the immune therapy wasn't working. We were not told at the time, but MER wasn't working for anyone else in the study, either. My grandmother's leukemia soon accelerated, then exploded into "blast crisis," which means that hordes of primitive cells invade vital organs like the lungs, the liver, and the kidneys, and the patient becomes susceptible to infections. In 1976, Grandma Rose contracted a bacterial pneumonia and died.

In many respects, my grandmother's experience in Phase I and Phase II trials was typical; most cancer treatments are unpleasant at best, and there is no way to judge the efficacy of a new approach without testing it on human beings. What was unusual was how little scientific basis there was for these particular experiments, and how much sensationalism surrounded them. Everyone involved in the war on cancer—from

Mary Lasker and President Nixon to my grandmother's oncologist—had raised the hopes of Americans suffering from the disease to extraordinary heights. The Bicentennial celebrations came and went, and more people were dying of cancer than ever before.

In 1977, when Dr. Arthur Upton, a radiation expert, was appointed director of the National Cancer Institute, he was immediately attacked for the N.C.I.'s failures. "I spent much of my time disabusing the public of the notion that the war on cancer was like the Manhattan Project or the Apollo space program," he told me recently. "It wasn't merely engineering. We didn't know enough about biology to understand the problem and point to solutions." Clinicians argued that not enough money had been earmarked for trials of different therapies, while scientists doing basic research pointed to millions of dollars that had been spent chasing nonexistent viruses. Upton began to question how the N.C.I.'s budget was being handled. "Bureaucrats were spending vast sums of money at the N.C.I. without rigorous peer review," he said. "Contracts were

awarded without any real scrutiny. I was besieged by scientists who felt money was being wasted." Instead of letting the senior staff at the N.C.I. continue to dictate research objectives and then contract outside laboratories to perform much of the work, Upton gave priority to non-government scientists who applied for grants. These applications were assessed by an independent committee of scientific peers. "I took a lot of heat for it," Upton said. "Bureaucrats didn't like their turf being invaded."

During this period, Dr. Harold Varmus and Dr. Michael Bishop, at the University of California, San Francisco, who were using federal funds to study viruses as the cause of cancer, found evidence to suggest the opposite: that the seeds of our destruction are present within our DNA. These seeds are oncogenes, genes that can cause cancer when they mutate. Although the significance of oncogenes was not immediately understood, by the early nineteen-eighties the notion that most cancers were caused by human retroviruses had been largely discarded. The bulk of cancer research had been built on a false premise.

Yet the idea that the immune system could be stimulated to recognize and attack cancer cells—that the power to heal ourselves lies within our own bodies—remained tantalizing, even after the failure of treatments like MER. Some conjectured that the crude immune boosters like the ones my grandmother received had failed only because the triggers were not powerful enough, and that what was needed was a pure and potent stimulus. Interferon, a natural protein that functions as part of the body's immune system, was believed to be such a trigger.

Three major types of interferon had been identified—alpha, beta, and gamma—and laboratory experiments suggested that all of them might be effective in fighting aggressive, chemotherapy-resistant cancers, such as melanoma, metastatic breast cancer, and kidney cancer. Animal tests were encouraging; in mice, interferon caused tumors to melt away without harming normal tissue. Soon oncologists and journalists were speaking of interferon as the long-awaited panacea, and on March 31, 1980, *Time* ran a cover story on the drug. The American Cancer Society spent two million dollars on interferon that had been puri-

fied in Finland from the blood of volunteer donors. Pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies spent hundreds of millions of dollars to genetically engineer alpha, beta, and gamma interferon, then produced the proteins in large quantities. With great fanfare, clinical trials began.

As a cancer researcher in Boston, I participated in Phase II studies of alpha and gamma interferon. As soon as the trials were announced, we were deluged with requests from cancer patients who were desperate to participate; we could admit only a few, and then had to explain to hundreds of others that the rosters were filled.

A woman I will call Nora Dusquette was accepted for treatment in 1983. Nora, a middle-aged schoolteacher, was in the late stages of malignant melanoma. The cancer not only had formed large black deposits in the skin on her arms and back but had spread to her lymph nodes, her lungs, and her liver. We treated her with high doses of interferon by injection three times a week. Nora lived in New Hampshire, and was still teaching full time when she first came to see me, and yet she was more than willing to drive two and a half hours to Boston for her therapy.

Nora experienced intense side effects: fevers, chills, loss of appetite, and extreme fatigue. After her injections, she was rarely able to sleep through the night. She also started losing weight rapidly. Soon she was no longer able to teach or to maintain her household, and she had to rely on family members to take care of her. After four months, it was clear that the treatment wasn't having any impact. The cancer spread to her brain, and a few weeks later she died.

For the vast majority of cancers, it turned out, interferon just didn't work. Alpha interferon did prove successful in the treatment of some rare cancers—especially hairy-cell leukemia—but Nora's experience was typical: like the majority of cancer patients who participate in these kinds of studies, she suffered considerable toxicity with no apparent benefit.

By 1985, hopes had shifted to a protein called interleukin-2, which had been discovered at an N.C.I. laboratory. Interleukin-2 stimulates immune cells

called T lymphocytes. Dr. Steven Rosenberg, at the N.C.I., experimented with removing lymphocytes from cancer patients, stimulating them with interleukin-2, and returning them to the patients. In a few instances, there seemed to be significant shrinkage of metastatic melanoma and kidney cancer. Again, the news media were filled with speculations that a cure had been found. The N.C.I. spent millions of dollars supporting interleukin-2 trials, which were administered to cancer patients both at the N.C.I. and in cancer centers across the nation. The new treatment was also extremely toxic. A few patients experienced severe cardiac and pulmonary complications and died.

In 1987, a fifty-seven-year-old friend and colleague I will call Samuel Driscoll received a diagnosis of kidney cancer. He underwent extensive surgery to excise the primary cancer and the metastatic deposits, which were in his abdomen and lungs, but within a year the cancer had returned. Sam participated in a Phase II study using interleukin-2. Lymphocytes were removed from his blood, treated in the laboratory with the immune-stimulating protein, and then reinfused. As with virtually all other patients in these clinical trials, he suffered severe side effects and had to be hospitalized. He had high fevers, a widespread rash, and difficulty breathing; his body became painfully bloated. Sam did enjoy a six-month remission, during which he continued to teach and do research. Then the cancer recurred—this time in his lungs—and he died of pulmonary failure within a month.

Why did doctors welcome therapies with known toxicity and uncertain gain, and why did patients like Sam Driscoll subject themselves to them? Because the conventional therapies were no better. The best way to treat tumors is by detecting them early enough to prevent their growth and spread, but many oncologists don't meet their patients until long after that point. As one doctor said bitterly to me, "What do you say to these people—"Too bad, you flunked prevention?" Ironically, the nature of the N.C.I. studies meant that in Phase III trials treatments with slight benefits were used on more patients for a longer time; interferon, for example,

affords at best a marginal improvement, so it is possible to discern its benefits only in large studies conducted over long periods.

Most of the new cancer drugs were extremely toxic, and the real advances were in finding drugs that would temper their side effects. Platinol, which can cure testicular cancer, caused intense nausea and projectile vomiting that could last for days; in some patients, the retching was so severe that it tore the esophagus. It led researchers to develop potent anti-emetics. Other chemotherapy drugs, like Adriamycin, destroyed so many white blood cells that the patient was susceptible to fatal infections. Proteins like G-CSF were found that could stimulate the bone marrow to produce white cells, thereby greatly reducing the likelihood of such complicating infections. Even some of the toxicity of interleukin-2 was ameliorated. Thus, the horrors of chemotherapy were sometimes made less severe, or, at least, less prolonged. Chemo also became easier to administer, and oncologists could offer some reassurance to their patients that refinements in supportive therapy would reduce the suffering.

By the nineteen-eighties, a huge superstructure had resulted from the government's war on cancer. Some eight billion dollars had been spent. About thirty government-funded comprehensive cancer centers and major regional cooperative treatment groups linked virtually all university hospitals and community-based specialists. The American Society of Clinical Oncology had grown from several hundred members to nearly ten thousand. Cancer treatment had become one of the cash cows of academic and community hospitals, which competed fiercely for patient referrals. Treatment had also become the focus of a wide range of cancer-advocacy groups, whose constituents forcefully lobbied Congress for more funds to address their needs.

There were some success stories; by laboriously cobbling together combinations of chemotherapy agents, researchers had discovered that the majority of patients with Hodgkin's lymphoma and nearly all patients with testicular cancer could be saved. Great strides were also made in treating several pediatric cancers. Unfortunately, all of these types of

tumors are relatively unusual. Hundreds of thousands of cancer patients underwent experimental treatments; in most cases, the pain and discomfort caused by the side effects were unaccompanied by genuine benefit, and in some cases the treatments were fatal.

In 1984, Vincent DeVita, who had become the director of the National Cancer Institute four years earlier, provided Congress with a new goal in the war on cancer: a fifty-per-cent reduction in cancer-related mortality by the year 2000. According to an article by John C. Bailar III and Elaine Smith, which appeared in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, in 1986, this prediction was not justified by clinical data. Bailar, who had worked at the National Cancer Institute as a statistician studying trends in cancer incidence and outcomes, had grown wary of the predictions surrounding the war on cancer. Bailar and Smith's paper, dispassionately analyzing the claims of recent "advances" in treating cancer, demonstrated that there had been a slow and steady increase in cancer deaths over several decades. It concluded that "we are losing the war against cancer."

The paper was extremely controversial. Some felt that the authors hadn't given certain treatments adequate time to be properly measured; others felt that their statistics were not meaningful without more specifics. In response, in 1997 Bailar and Heather Gornik published a more sophisticated analysis in the same journal, entitled "Cancer Undeclared." Here the authors examined all American cancer deaths between 1970 and 1994 according to age, sex, and type of disease. They showed that there had been a six-per-cent increase in age-adjusted mortality due to cancer since Congress first acted, at the behest of Mary Lasker. There had been a recent dip, about a quarter of a per cent per year, which they attributed to reduced cigarette smoking and improved screening (thanks to mammograms, colonoscopies, and Pap smears). This said little for the enormous efforts that had been made over the previous decades on the therapeutic front. Bailar believes that, instead of focussing exclusively on fighting this generation of cancers, our work should be directed toward thwarting future generations of tumors

through prevention and early detection.

In fact, the principal benefits from the war on cancer have been in other realms. The technologies developed to seek out cancer viruses in the seventies and eighties coalesced in the new field of molecular biology, which opened up the cell and its genetic blueprint to examination for the first time. This revolutionary DNA work also spawned a highly lucrative industry. Using the tools developed through the National Cancer Institute's contracts, biotechnology companies have created lifesaving treatments for heart disease, sepsis, colitis, and countless other serious maladies. Equally dramatic gains were made in AIDS research: the molecular techniques and reagents used to search for human cancer viruses proved essential in identifying H.I.V. and mapping its genes. In addition, the inventory of failed cancer drugs includes agents like AZT, which proved beneficial in treating AIDS. These unintended consequences of the war on cancer make it more difficult to gauge its success or failure.

"The idea of a war sets up a false metric," says Dr. David Golde, who, as the physician-in-chief at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, oversees all the institution's clinical programs. "If a complete victory is not achieved, then it is deemed a failure." Do we examine the impact on patients and their families? Do we ask whether patients' quality of life is improved—do they get more time without cancer, even if the tumor ultimately returns and kills them? Do we measure success and failure in terms of cost and benefit, calculating how much money is spent in treatment and how much economic productivity is gained for the nation? Or do we measure it by knowledge gained, progress in scientific understanding, even if that knowledge is not readily translated into improvements for patients? There is no consensus among cancer specialists on these questions.

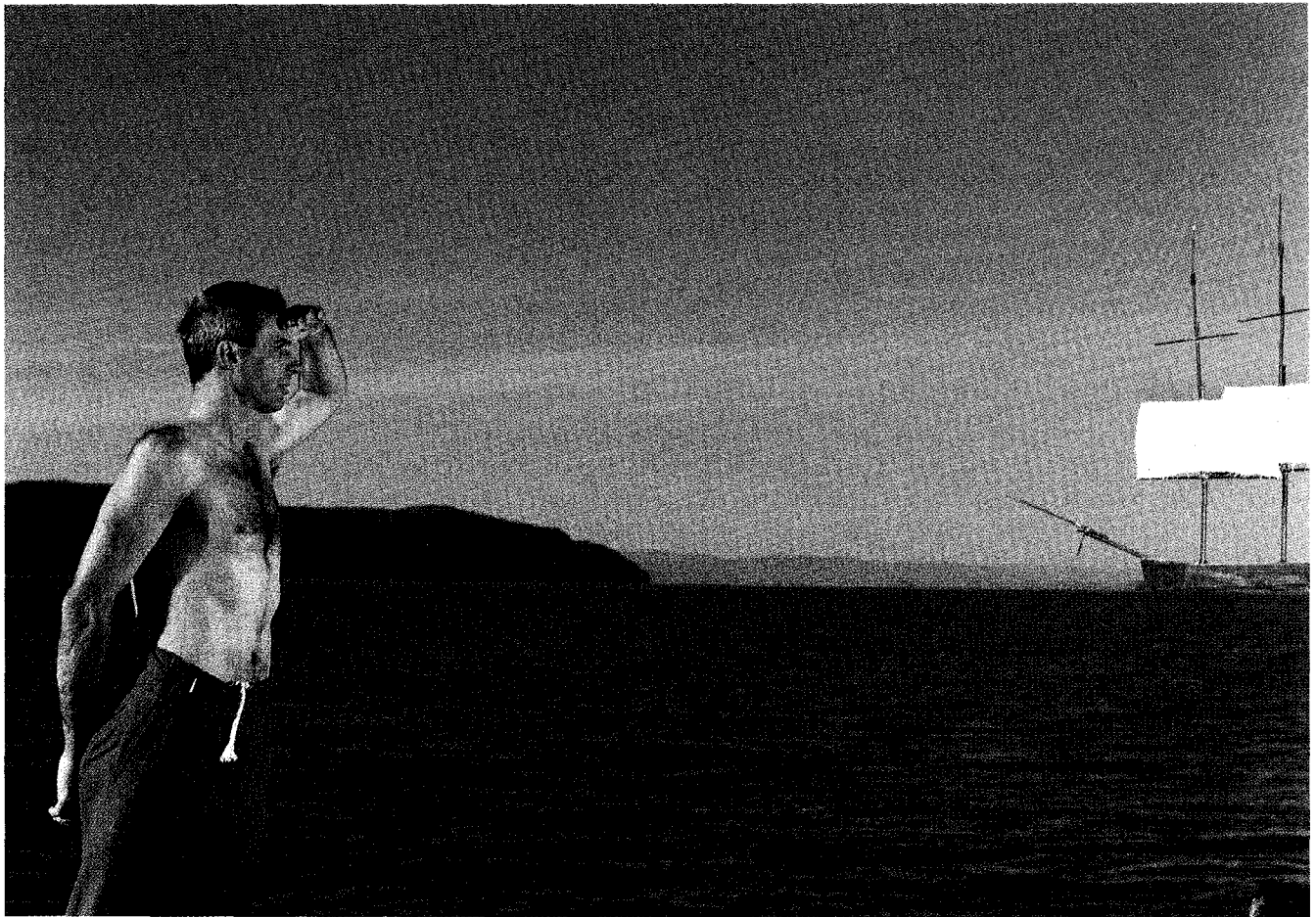
In the past decade, cancer research has progressed in a number of different directions. In the area of immune therapy, there have been some promising results from so-called monoclonal antibodies, like Rituxan, which train the immune system to recognize tumor cells. Three years ago, a flurry of excitement greeted some early results in animal

SHOWCASE BY ALEX & LAILA

MOBY-DICK

Carlo Adinolfi trained first as a dancer, and then, because money was an object, as a carpenter. His solo show "One-Man 'Moby-Dick'" will be presented at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, in Massachusetts, on July 19th, to celebrate the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the novel's publication, and later this summer at the Shakespeare & Company studio festival in the Berkshires. In it, Adinolfi plays Ishmael (a surprisingly spry, chatty Ishmael, with something of an English accent, since Adinolfi, who is Italian, grew up in South London); he plays Ahab, pegging the stage in a fury; and, in a remarkable piece of species-shifting, Adinolfi also plays the whale. To become the monstrous, mysterious creature, he turns away from the audience, tucks his head below his shoulders, twists his feet around each other, and rolls and ripples his dorsal muscles. The carpenter Adinolfi—he makes a living building sets—has constructed a series of props, the gradual unveiling of which amounts to an adventure story all its own: a few struts of wood become the prow of a whaling boat; Pip, the boy driven mad by a fall overboard, is a wooden artist's model suspended on a string; a length of silk fabric becomes, variously, the rippling water, the whale's flank, and, when squeezed between Adinolfi's hands, a mound of precious sperm-aceti. Adinolfi transforms a tiny stage into both the sea-locked world of the Pequod's decks and the vast, unfathomable sea itself. In an extraordinary scene based on the chapter "The Grand Armada," he drags a tiny wooden vessel on a wire across the stage, which thereby becomes the ocean's surface, arched with endless sky. Then he picks up the model and hangs it from a hook overhead, and suddenly we are in the other element—the deep, where only the whales are at home.

—Rebecca Mead



studies of angiogenesis, conducted by the researcher Judah Folkman. Folkman's research identified compounds that might prevent a tumor from generating its own blood supply, and so choke its growth. Unfortunately, the first clinical studies have not shown significant shrinkage of tumors.

By far the greatest source of excitement in cancer research, however, has been targeted therapies, an approach to treatment that is tailored to specific kinds of cancers. Unlike most experimental treatments of the past three decades, targeted therapies are based on a growing understanding of the molecular machinery of the diseased cell. The oncogene is the cornerstone of the new approach—which is based on the work of Robert Weinberg, a scientist at M.I.T.

In the late seventies, Weinberg began conducting just the sort of research that Farber had insisted was no longer necessary: an exploratory investigation of the oncogene's possible relationship to the origin of human cancer. Within a few years, he had found a conclusive link between the mutations of an oncogene and the development of a bladder tumor. Mutations in all our genes occur every minute, because there is an intrinsic error rate when DNA is copied. If the errors are extreme, the cell will self-destruct, but otherwise the aberrant cell survives.

Normally, oncogenes provide the blueprint for proteins that signal when a cell should divide, mature, and die; they are often described as the accelerators of the cell's growth. A mutated oncogene may direct a cell to reproduce wildly, and this means, in turn, that more mutations are likely to occur.

In 1986, Weinberg isolated another type of genes, called tumor suppressors. These act as brakes on growth, but, when they mutate, the brakes can fail. Yet a third genetic control, the so-called telomerase gene, helps determine how long a cell can perpetuate itself. Normal cells can divide only a set number of times, but an alteration in the telomerase gene can make a cell immortal. A cell becomes cancerous when several preconditions are met: mutations in oncogenes, or simply an excess of oncogenes, either of which promotes growth; changes in tumor-suppressor genes, which then fail to restrain growth; and changes in telomerase genes, which sustain the mutating cell. In 1999, Weinberg demonstrated this when he produced a cancer cell from a normal cell in the test tube by introducing oncogenes, tumor-suppressor genes, and telomerase into a healthy cell. It was the first time that human cancer had been artificially created.

As the significance of Weinberg's work became clear, researchers in both

the private and the public sectors began searching for ways to target these malfunctioning genes. Chemotherapy and radiation have traditionally been crude tools against cancer, indiscriminately smashing not only the diseased cells but the healthy tissue around them. A sophisticated understanding of the cell's workings greatly increases the likelihood that the mutant genes can be shut down without affecting the healthy cells. In 1993, the Swiss drug company Ciba-Geigy synthesized hundreds of thousands of possible targeted therapies, which it then tested against dozens of oncogene proteins. One of the targeted drugs was STI-571.

Doug Jenson is a sixty-seven-year-old retired systems engineer who lives in the Pacific Northwest. Four years ago, attending a Promise Keepers rally in Washington, D.C., he was overcome by exhaustion. A month later, after lunch at his church, he noted that his urine was "the color of cranberry juice." This was followed by wheezing and shortness of breath. He went to his local doctor, who gave him a blood test. The doctor called back that evening. "I hate to tell you this over the phone," he said, "but your white count is more than three hundred thousand." Jenson's diagnosis was chronic myelogenous leukemia, the same cancer that killed my grandmother. "They told me I had three to five years at the most," Jenson said. He was a robust man, five feet eleven and two hundred and twenty pounds, but his condition deteriorated rapidly. Initially, he was treated with chemotherapy, and that brought his white count down to about fifty thousand. This was a temporizing measure. Later, he began interferon treatments. Interferon has a modest benefit for CML patients, and significant side effects. Jenson became severely anemic, and then suffered a seizure. "The stuff is killing you," his hematologist said. But there seemed to be no alternative. Then, in September of 1998, Doug Jenson was referred to Dr. Brian Druker, a leukemia expert at Oregon's Health Sciences University, who enrolled him in a Phase I study of an experimental drug, STI-571.

Five years earlier, Druker had received a series of compounds from Ciba-Geigy to test on malignant cells, and he worked with the company to choose what ap-

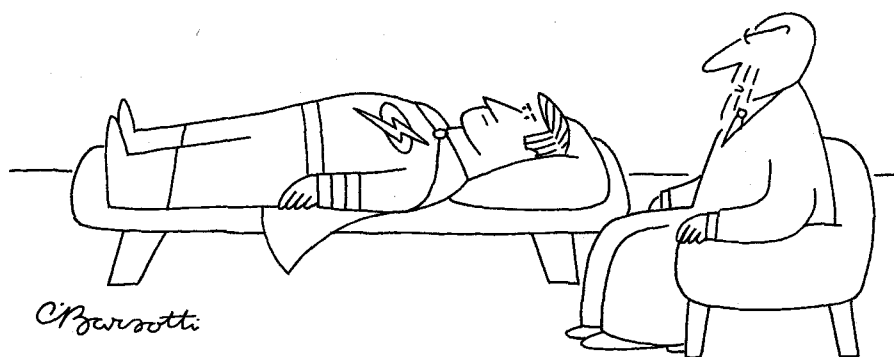


"Let's not waste missiles on cities not important enough to have a professional sports franchise."

peared to be the best of the series of candidate drugs. Among them was the compound STI-571, which appeared to be an ideal tool: it deftly dismantles three oncogene proteins, including one called Abl, which is the accelerator of chronic myelogenous leukemia. When it was tested in small animals, however, it was found to cause liver damage in dogs, and the pharmaceutical company, with meagre experience in cancer drugs, was leery about beginning human trials. But Druker pushed hard, because of the striking effects in the test tube against CML. In June of 1998, three institutions—Oregon, U.C.L.A., and M. D. Anderson, in Houston—began a Phase I safety study in patients with CML. To date, they have not reached a maximally tolerated dose, meaning a dose of STI-571 that causes significant toxicity in patients. The alarming dog studies proved not to be relevant for human beings.

Jenson had lost seventy pounds during his illness and prior treatment, and he gained it all back when he started taking STI-571. Within a few weeks, his white count fell to fifteen thousand. Not long after that, his anemia was ameliorated, and his platelets returned to normal. Few white cells that show the mutated Abl oncogene remain. "I go up to the health club every day, sometimes twice a day," he said. "I take spinning classes three times a week." The only side effect has been "a little puffiness around the eyes, which comes and goes." How long the benefits will continue is unknown, but, like the vast majority of the more than five hundred patients with CML who have been treated with STI-571 in the Phase II study, Jenson has enjoyed a profound and sustained remission. "It is a journey I don't wish on anyone," he said. "But, all things considered, I've been very, very fortunate."

Druker is cautious about the drug's dramatic results; negative side effects could still manifest themselves in the future, and the leukemia could also become resistant to the drug, precipitating relapse. Still, STI-571 is the most exciting new cancer drug in years. It turns out that the drug blocks oncogenes that may be critical to other kinds of cancer, such as glioblastoma, a type of brain tumor, and gastrointestinal stromal tumor, a rare sarcoma of the intestine. On May 10th,



"Surely you can tell me your secret identity."

at a Washington press conference, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, announced the F.D.A.'s approval of STI-571, after only two and a half months of review. It was the fastest agency clearance ever for a cancer drug.

DeVita believes that the recent advances in cancer genetics will allow us to make enormous strides in treatment almost immediately. For him, STI-571—now known as Gleevec—is the proof of the principle. "I think we have the targets," he said. "It's not difficult to synthesize chemicals that block those targets. And when they come into clinical trials they work—surprisingly well." In the *Barron's* article, he said, "Within 15-20 years, I think cancer will become just another chronic, survivable disease, much like hypertension or diabetes." He predicts that the difficulties will lie not with the science but with the lack of resources for clinical trials to test all the drugs that will soon be discovered.

But is making Gleevec the poster child of imminent targeted cures premature—a replay of Sidney Farber's response to his success with childhood leukemia? After all, curing cancer entails understanding a hundred-odd diseases, which behave in different ways in different individuals. In the lab, the chemicals that are being screened are interacting only with the proteins of oncogenes or tumor-suppressor genes. In the patient, however, they are interacting with a complex living organism; it is impossible to accurately predict the success of chemicals that look promising in the lab.

I spoke with Dr. Glenn Bubley, a cancer researcher at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, who, in 1997, conducted a clinical trial of a drug called SU-101. "SU-101 was touted as the Second Coming a few years ago," Bubley told me. It is a small molecule that, like STI-571, blocks PDGF-r, an oncogene that is believed to be important in the proliferation of a number of intractable cancers. When human tumors that had high levels of PDGF-r were implanted in mice, treatment with SU-101 blocked their growth. Safety tests in animals, unlike those involving STI-571, were promising, with no major liver toxicity or other red flags, and researchers anticipated dramatic success in the clinical trials.

A patient I will call George Mitsopoulos was a restaurant owner who had prostate cancer. He was still working when he entered the trial, despite the fact that his cancer had spread to his bones. The tumors could no longer be controlled by hormonal therapy, and so he began treatment with great hopes that SU-101 would ameliorate his condition. He quickly discovered, however, that the drug had severe side effects. "I am exhausted," he told Dr. Bubley. "I feel like I can hardly move out of bed." He also had immense difficulty sleeping, because he felt terrible even when he was lying down. Other patients in the trial begged to interrupt the therapy because of the exhaustion it caused, but Mitsopoulos was determined to persevere. The course of treatment had no lasting impact, and he died shortly afterward.

Mitsopoulos's experience with SU-101



"And do you, Stephanie, promise to love, honor, and 'obey'?"

proved to be typical. What went wrong? Many cancer cells may have redundant machinery, with several different oncogenes driving growth; if you block one, the others may take up the slack. The pharmaceutical company that had supported the research was not enthusiastic about publishing negative data, Bubley said—even high-profile journals prefer articles with positive results—but he believes that it is equally important to publish accounts of the failures, in order to inject a note of realism into the scientific debate. (An article about the failure of SU-101 in treating prostate cancer was published last month in *Clinical Cancer Research*.)

Other targeted treatments, like Herceptin, an antibody developed by Genentech, have performed better—but not nearly as well as some clinicians initially expected them to. Herceptin targets Her-2, a protein produced by an oncogene that is found in between twenty and thirty per cent of breast-cancer cases. The early news was exciting, and magazines and morning talk shows reported that Herceptin would make chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer a thing of the past. When Herceptin is used in conjunction with chemotherapy, it nearly

doubles the likelihood of significant shrinkage of breast cancers with Her-2. But as a solo treatment for breast cancer its impact has been modest. Last year, Genentech alerted physicians to a potentially lethal respiratory problem among women who had breast cancer that had spread to their lungs or who had prior lung disease. It can also cause significant heart damage in some women—particularly those receiving Adriamycin, a mainstay chemotherapy drug in the treatment of the disease. This is because in this form of breast cancer, as in some other cancers, the problem lies not with a mutated oncogene but with an excess of normal oncogenes, and targeting them can damage healthy heart tissue as well. *The New England Journal of Medicine* recently described the Herceptin study as "a landmark trial," even though it extended life for an average of only five months, and only in the subset of patients who qualified for the treatment. The description is less an example of hyperbole than a sobering reminder of the fact that no prior therapies had been shown to significantly extend the lives of women with metastatic breast cancer.

These limitations reveal how com-

plex the biology of cancer is, and how little can be predicted about the efficacy of any particular treatment. The statistician John Bailer, for one, remains skeptical of the new therapies. "In the nineteen-fifties, there was huge excitement about laboratory programs to screen for chemotherapy drugs," he says. "We found a few drugs, but not many. Then, in the nineteen-seventies, there were cancer viruses. In the eighties, it was immunotherapy, with biologics like interferon and interleukin-2 as the model magic bullets. Now it's cancer genetics. The rhetoric today sounds just the way it did forty years ago. I have no doubt that there has been a huge increase in knowledge about cancer. The problem is to translate it into public benefits we can measure. I want to see an impact on population mortality rates. If the treatments are really that good, then we'll see it."

After decades of listening to unrealistic predictions, cancer-patient advocates have a jaundiced view of researchers who inflate preliminary anecdotes of success. Fran Visco, the president of the National Breast Cancer Coalition, told me recently that she was dismayed, at a meeting of cancer clinicians, at the way researchers interacted with members of the press. "These clinical scientists receive media training and are scripted by their hospitals," she said. "There are so many agendas here: fame, patient referrals, fund-raising, pharmaceutical grants, academic advancement." Ellen Stovall, the president of the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, agreed: "The headlines are dreadful." She referred to the sensationalism surrounding the disease as "the pornography of cancer," adding, "I am excited by the new science, but show me hard data. We need to raise the skepticism barometer."

Many former members of the cancer establishment express similar misgivings. Samuel Broder, who succeeded DeVita in 1988 as the director of the National Cancer Institute, and who is currently the chief medical officer at Celera Genomics, believes that we require new breakthroughs in the lab—particularly in understanding the process of how cancer spreads—before we can be confident of great gains in treatment.

"I call it the iron-lung syndrome,"

he told me. "If you had demanded that the N.I.H. solve the problem of polio not through independent, investigator-driven discovery research but by means of a centrally directed program, the odds are very strong that you would get the very best iron lungs in the world—portable iron lungs, transistorized iron lungs—but you wouldn't get the vaccine that eradicated polio." He thinks that, given the performance of the targeted therapies available so far, it would be premature to invest more in the federal bureaucracy that oversees clinical trials.

Broder argues that the creation of new therapies is no longer the sole or even the primary provenance of the government. "Initiative and creativity have moved to the private sector," he said. "There is just no way of getting around it, and anyone who tells you otherwise is on a different planet. What was done in the early seventies was necessary, even in retrospect, but that doesn't mean we should do it that way now." Furthermore, pharmaceutical companies prefer to run their own clinical trials: both Gleevec and Herceptin were submitted to the F.D.A. for approval without having entered N.C.I.-sponsored studies. This frees more money for the sort of basic research supported by the National Institutes of Health—the grant system and research laboratories that Broder refers to as the jewels in the crown of the N.I.H. Any scientist or clinician in the United States can propose a new idea and seek support for testing it. "When the N.I.H. sticks to that," Broder said, "it does an astonishing job, and it is the envy of the world."

Harold Varmus is a former director of the National Institutes of Health, and, like Broder, his experience as the head of a large government institute has made him wary of bureaucratic efforts to direct scientific research. Now, as the president of Memorial Sloan-Kettering, he finds himself in a curious position. "My view here is not very popular—especially among cancer researchers and cancer-focussed senators—but I believe cancer doesn't deserve unique distinction for funding," he said recently. Giving one advocacy group special treatment simply doesn't help the balance of research. Varmus also believes that the greatest advances in new knowledge will come not from cancer genetics alone but from a

variety of disciplines working together to understand the complex mechanisms of the cancer cell. After all, genes are merely the blueprints for proteins, and it is the proteins that do the cell's work. An ability to decipher protein shapes—how they change in health and disease—will be important in combatting cancer, and this will require advances in chemistry, in computer science, and in physics.

In recent years, the mission to reeducate Congress and the public about the realities of cancer and to reverse the unrealistic attitudes and expectations that we have inherited from Nixon's war has been taken up by an unlikely advocate—the current head of the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Richard Klausner. "I'm pretty well plugged in to what's going on in research," he remarked. "I hear on the news 'Major breakthrough in cancer!' And I think, Gee, I haven't heard anything major recently. Then I listen to the broadcast and realize that I've never heard of this breakthrough. And then I never hear of it again." Klausner himself has been under considerable pressure to predict the eradication of cancer, because powerful members of Congress have promised that such a prediction could mean millions of additional government dollars for the N.C.I. But he refuses—not only because to do so is impossible but because it would propagate the scientific fallacy that cancer is a single disease.

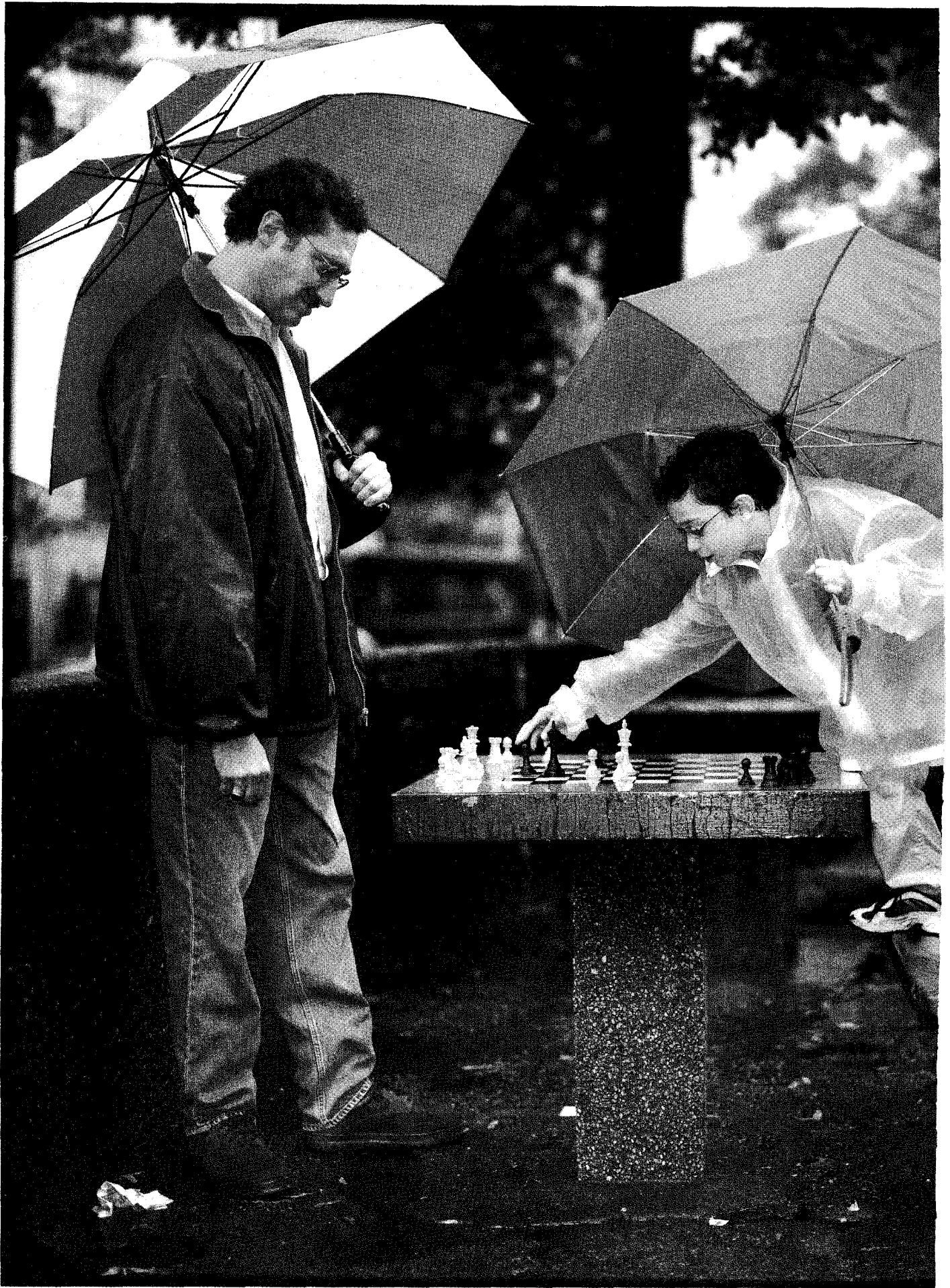
The most productive way to move forward in cancer research, Klausner believes, is to call off the war. He prefers to think of cancer as an intricate puzzle—one that we currently lack both the knowledge and the tools to solve. Clues could come from any field, and the reforms that he has undertaken at the N.C.I. reflect the need for such disciplinary openness. He has tackled the vast clinical-trials bureaucracy of the co-operative groups so that they no longer function as a closed shop controlled by inbred committees but are, instead, responsive to any researcher with good ideas. He also recognizes that the N.C.I. should complement the drug companies' efforts rather than duplicate them; to this end, the N.C.I. provides assistance to university-based laboratories that are pursuing molecular targets and candidate drugs but lack sufficient re-

sources to develop and market them. So far, more than fifty compounds and molecular targets have been developed in this manner, and two have entered the first phase of clinical testing.

Klausner refers to these reforms as "an experiment, to see if science can take over the National Cancer Institute, instead of politics and hype." He continued, "Human beings seem to have this endless ability to think they are at the end of history. The only people who now are saying we know enough are people who don't know enough."

Francis Moore's congressional testimony about science's law of unintended consequences has been amply proved over the past thirty years. The failures of the government's war on cancer have been matched by the unforeseen successes it led to in fighting other diseases; indeed, its greatest successes came from shattering its central premise—the belief in cancer viruses. As Moore predicted, the most promising results stemmed from basic biological inquiry. And yet both Congress and the public continue to view open-ended scientific investigations as nebulous, self-indulgent, and wasteful of taxpayers' money, and are reluctant to fund them. For this reason, oncologists talk in terms of imminent cures through directed research—both in their proposals for new projects and in their assessments of ongoing work. The media attention that results further misleads the public.

If Americans are unwilling to reject the national mythology of cancer, it may be because they fear that the only alternative is despair. That fear can be tempered by the rapid pace and diversity of new discoveries in science and technology that are influencing every dimension of cancer research. Of course, it is impossible to say which type of currently intractable cancer will be cured first. In the next ten years, the survival rate of people with a certain type of melanoma or lung tumor or lymphoma or breast cancer may not change. But it also might improve by fifty per cent, or ninety per cent. Because of the uncertainty inherent in scientific discovery, there is simply no way of knowing. Paradoxically, for cancer patients and their families this inability to predict the future becomes their sustaining hope. ♦



SABA

THE PANDOLFINI DEFENSE

One man's mission to prove that championship chess isn't just for eccentrics.

BY PAUL HOFFMAN

As the first round of the United States Chess Federation National Scholastic K-12 Grade Championships began in Orlando last December, the tournament director ordered the parents out of the hotel ballroom in which the games were held, and the doors were sealed with police caution tape. Inside, fourteen hundred and forty-two kids sat at long tables. Over the weekend, they would play six rounds of tournament chess against kids in their own grade—a schedule so tight that no one had time to go to Disney World. The clocks were started, and the room was quiet except for lots of nervous coughing and the occasional sound of a chess piece being aggressively slammed on the board. If a kid needed to go to the bathroom—and some had to go every few minutes—he was allowed to exit through a side door but was told not to speak to his parents, lest one of them blurt out how he could checkmate in two moves. The pushiest parents crowded around the door and, when it opened, craned their necks for a glimpse of their son or daughter (ten per cent of the players were girls). Did their son's dour expression mean that he had lost his queen? Or was he frowning so that he wouldn't give away the trap he was about to spring? Down the hall from the tournament, dozens of rosy-cheeked young girls were competing in a beauty pageant; their parents were markedly calmer.

Bruce Pandolfini's students were among the tournament veterans. Pandolfini is fifty-three years old, and teaches chess in New York City. Many high-level chess players struggle just to pay the rent, but Pandolfini has managed to make two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year from the game. Last year,

a Fortune 500 company hired him, at seventy-five hundred dollars an hour, to sit with its top executives and share with them the mind-set of a chess master, in the hope that they could apply it to their corporate strategy. Pandolfini has written two dozen chess books, which have sold more than a million copies. He charges two hundred dollars an hour for private lessons and starts them as late as 1 A.M., even though most of his students are under the age of ten. He teaches not just any kids, but those who already display a gift for the game, and he will drop his fee if the parents of a particularly talented child are not well off. "I want to work with the smartest kids," he told me. "I won't let a smart one get away."

Pandolfini's method at the annual scholastic tournament is always the same. During the rounds, he relaxes in his hotel room because he, like the parents, is not allowed in the playing hall, and if he appears outside it he is accosted by strangers who want to know how to turn their child into a world champion. But, as the rounds finish, he races from one student's hotel room to another, rapidly analyzing the games—finding something the kid did right even in the most one-sided loss—and psyching the kid up for the next round.

Adam Weser, a nine-year-old from Long Island and one of Pandolfini's students, had been a co-champion at the National Elementary Chess Championship, held in Texas last May. This time, he was hoping to rank first out of a hundred and ninety-nine fourth graders. His father, Matthew Weser; his mother, Bonnie; and her parents, Naomi and Seymour, had flown to Florida from New York with Adam.

In the first round, Adam came from

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN SCHOELLER

Bruce Pandolfini, with one of his students, eight-year-old Fabiano Caruana, says, "I want to work with the smartest kids. I won't let a smart one get away."

behind to eke out a victory. Afterward, Pandolfini, who has coached Adam for two years, joined the family in their hotel room to replay the game. Adam is by nature a counter-puncher: he enjoys defending, being pushed to the brink of defeat, and then bouncing back when his opponent has overreached. It is nerve-racking to watch, and Adam's parents never know whether he is about to lose or rebound to victory, but it reminds Pandolfini of his own style when he played tournament chess, in the nineteen-sixties.

"Adam shouldn't have to live on the edge," Matthew told Pandolfini.

"He has so much talent," Bonnie added. "He should just be able to crush the other kids."

Pandolfini ignored Bonnie and Matthew's remarks as he examined Adam's score sheet and replayed the moves. "How are you going to survive this?" Pandolfini asked, shaking his head at a terrible position Adam had got himself into.

"I'm the best! I'm the best!" Adam shouted in response, thrusting his fist into the air and jumping on one of the beds.

"If you're so good," his father said, "why do you have to play moves like this? You should have moved here." Matthew reached over and demonstrated.

"Great!" Bonnie said. "My husband thinks he's Bobby Fischer. I love my husband. But please, Bruce, put him in his place."

"Adam, you're giving him more material," Pandolfini continued. "What's this, Bargain Day at Macy's? How did you get out of this?"

"My opponent touched a piece he didn't mean to move," Adam said, "and I made him move it."

"You've always been good at enforcing the touch-move rule and, for that matter, every other rule," Pandolfini said.

"Then look what happened," Adam said, demonstrating how he had mopped up the opponent's pawns. "I moved my rook here! Look at the move. I love it!"

"You're a human vacuum cleaner," Pandolfini said approvingly. "But, next time, take command from the beginning and you'll play even better."

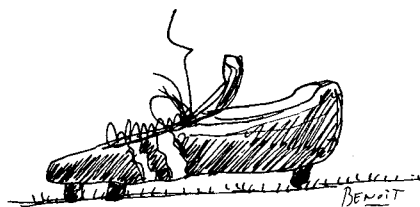
"He certainly can't play any worse," Matthew said.

Adam Weser beat his opponents de-

cisively in the next three rounds; he didn't need much psyching up. Then, in the fifth round, he lost a bruising seesaw battle, after his opponent surprised him on the first move with the rare Englund Gambit, an immediate sacrifice of the king's pawn. "Adam cried for half an hour and I couldn't console him," Bonnie said. "He kept screaming, 'They're going to take my championship away!'"

Chess is seen as a game of great intelligence, but, at the same time, it is often associated with obsessiveness and insanity. Every chess club, it seems, has a member who left his wife or his job to play the game all day. Paul Morphy, an American player who was considered the best in the world, withdrew from tournament chess at the peak of his career, in 1859, and spent his days arranging women's shoes in a half-circle in his bedroom, pacing on his veranda, and muttering in French, "He will plant the banner of Castile on the walls of Madrid, with the cry 'The city is taken,' and the little king will go away utterly shamefaced." He is not the only champion known for his eccentricity: Bobby Fischer, the sole American to win the world title, in 1972, reportedly had the fillings in his teeth removed for fear that they might be antennas receiving radio messages beamed by his enemies. Wilhelm Steinitz, a late-nineteenth-century world champion, claimed to have beaten God in spite of having graciously given Him the advantage of the first move and having played without one of his pawns. A whole body of literature, psychoanalytic and fictional, from Ernest Jones's "The Problem of Paul Morphy" to Stefan Zweig's "The Royal Game" and Vladimir Nabokov's "The Defense," portrays the game as an incubator for psychopathology.

And yet chess in the United States has reached a new level of popularity. People who took up the game in the nineteen-seventies, enthralled by Bobby Fischer, have taught their children how



to play. The United States Chess Federation, a sixty-one-year-old organization that sanctions tournaments and ranks players, has more than ninety thousand members—triple the number in 1972, when Fischer beat Boris Spassky. In New York City public schools, thirty-six thousand children now study the game in a program co-founded by Pandolfini in 1986.

Pandolfini became the first full-time chess teacher in this country after he analyzed the Fischer-Spassky match on public television, which made him an overnight celebrity. The 1993 movie "Searching for Bobby Fischer" was based on him and one of his students, Josh Waitzkin. With its uplifting ending (Josh wins the tournament with great dignity), the film was an advertisement for chess and for Pandolfini. The actor Ben Kingsley portrays him as a stern, enigmatic taskmaster with an Irish accent who was scarred by a devastating chess loss years before—a character out of a Beckett play.

The real Pandolfini is neither stern nor aloof, although he did give up tournament chess three decades ago, after playing a game in which he missed an easy win. He has an easygoing warmth to which kids respond. At the end of most lessons, he rewards his students with a Beanie Baby. He is not without his own eccentricities; the parents of his students often have a hard time reaching him, because he doesn't answer his home phone, and sometimes he doesn't respond to their messages for days. They do not know if he is married or not—he wouldn't talk to me about his private life—and they have never seen his apartment. All they know is that his regular visit to teach chess is often the high point of their child's week.

Pandolfini did not start playing chess until he was thirteen, unlike most of his students, who have already entered, if not won, serious tournaments by that age. In his early childhood, in Borough Park, Brooklyn, he was preoccupied with baseball and basketball. "It was easy to be hooked on baseball after the first game I watched, at Ebbets Field in 1954, when I was six," Pandolfini said. "That day, I saw Willie Mays hit a home run and Jackie Robinson steal a base." Pandolfini's father, a W.P.A.-era realist painter, played chess socially at clubs

and coffeehouses (at one point, he managed the Marshall Chess Club, a venerable club on West Tenth Street) but did not teach his son the game, because he thought it was a deadbeat activity—he had seen too many people spend their days or nights slumped over chessboards without becoming good players. Pandolfini took up the game on his own, in 1961, when he stumbled upon the chess books in the stacks of the Brooklyn Public Library.

“I was fascinated by the books, all the little diagrams of chessboards, the cryptic notation in which the games are recorded, and the anecdotes about world chess champions and their challengers,” Pandolfini recalled. “I loved the players’ names—Bogolyubov, Botvinnik, Capablanca. And I loved the names for the opening sequences of moves: the Nimzo-Indian, the Fried Liver Attack, the Sicilian Dragon. There were something like thirty chess books in the library. I wanted to check out one or two, but I couldn’t make up my mind, so I took them all out and skipped school for a month to read them.”

During the summer of 1962, Pandolfini began taking the subway from Borough Park to Greenwich Village, where he played speed chess at the stone tables in Washington Square Park. “I couldn’t always get a game, because the people there often wanted to play for a quarter, and twenty-five cents meant a lot to me then,” Pandolfini said. “Sometimes I just watched. Every day in the park, I met a different person who claimed to have beaten Bobby Fischer.”

The next summer, before he turned fifteen, Pandolfini played in his first tournament, at the Marshall Club. The place has the musty atmosphere of a men’s smoking club, and in the nineteen-fifties and sixties artists and photographers often hung out there. “I remember watching a handsome, well-mannered gentleman play,” Pandolfini said. “He was Marcel Duchamp. Another time, Alfred Eisenstaedt came in and snapped my picture with a Brownie camera. These artists were drawn to chess players, who seemed more mysterious and weirder than themselves and yet were also in search of artistic truth, not on a canvas but on a chessboard.”

In that first tournament at the Marshall, which lasted ten weeks, Pandolfini



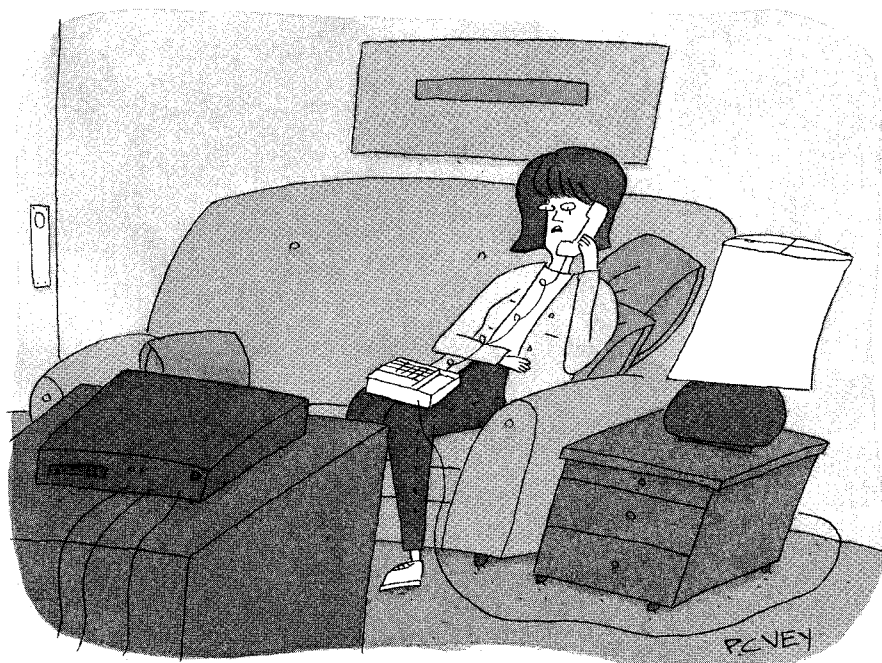
“This time, she went too far.”

got off to a poor start, and lost four games in a row. Then he drew a game and rallied to win his last five games—the final one against a nationally ranked expert. His debut earned him an official rating of 1732 from the United States Chess Federation; that meant that at fifteen he was considered a better player than about eighty per cent of all tournament competitors. A rating of 2200 makes you a master. The title “international master,” granted by FIDE, an organization that governs chess worldwide, usually corresponds to a comparable rating of 2400, based on international tournaments; a grandmaster generally has a rating above 2500. Bobby Fischer, at his peak, was rated 2810. Garry Kasparov achieved the highest rating ever, 2851. God is said to be rated 3000.

After his first tournament, Pandolfini decided to study the game more seriously. At a used-book store in the Village, he found a two-volume set, in Russian, containing five hundred games played by Mikhail Botvinnik, the father of modern Soviet chess, which he went over methodically for a year. Then he resolved to play sixty games from the 1941 Absolute Championship of the Soviet Union in

his head, move for move, without sight of the board or pieces. “It was very hard,” he said. “But I forced myself to do it. If I lost a position in my mind, which was quite common at first, I started again from the first move. To remember the moves, I would create a story line that tied all the logic of the game together. I would find relationships between the board and the pieces, the way certain squares naturally tie into typical maneuvers. And then you develop an intuitive sense of how to handle similar positions, and your moves flow naturally.”

Pandolfini was an undergraduate at the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University when the United States Chess Federation bestowed on him the title of chess master, putting him in the top one per cent of tournament players. “I remember the game that clinched it,” Pandolfini said. “I played the Caro-Kann Defense against Lawrence Day, a Canadian international master. I was on the verge of defeat, but then Day ran out of gas. I was thrilled. I wondered how far I could go. Did I have what it takes to become world champion? I thought I was the only lunatic who wondered about such things, but then I found that all my chess buddies fantasized about being



"I was hoping to settle this without avoiding some sort of argument."

world champion. But we gave up these illusions when we saw Fischer play. He was the real thing."

One Friday in New York, I watched Pandolfini give lessons to two of his students. I met him first at the East Village apartment he has had since 1976—"my inner sanctum," he calls it—a ten-foot-by-ten-foot room with an attached kitchenette and a small bathroom and closet. The kitchen is unusable, the stove and refrigerator blocked by a three-foot-high mound of running shoes, baseball cards, philosophy books, chess books, and posters from "Searching for Bobby Fischer." The main room is a nest of papers, books, and stacks of video and audio tapes—lectures on everything from the theory of general relativity to the origins of Romantic poetry—that reach three-quarters of the way to the ceiling. During the day, Pandolfini keeps his mattress in the closet so that there is room to move around. The answers to most questions you could ask about chess history are somewhere in his piles; today, he was rooting through the mess trying to find a 1964 chess magazine with a cover photo of George C. Scott playing chess with Stanley Kubrick on the set of "Dr. Strangelove."

"I gave a copy of the photo to

Mrs. George C. Scott," Pandolfini said. "She now wants another copy to give to Tom Cruise. He wants it because he has fond memories of playing chess with Kubrick on the set of 'Eyes Wide Shut.' Kubrick was good, but Bogart was probably Hollywood's best player." Although Pandolfini couldn't find the photo, he unearthed a Spanish comic book about love slaves, which Bobby Fischer had translated into English. As we examined Fischer's childlike writing, Pandolfini realized that he was forty-five minutes late for his first lesson, in Brooklyn. This is not unusual. Once, he failed to show up for a birthday party his friends threw for him at the Marshall. He always goes to a student's home to give lessons; it is less inconvenient for the student when he runs late.

Fabiano Caruana, the top-ranked player in the country under the age of eleven, was happy to see Pandolfini when we reached his parents' Park Slope apartment. He folded up his scooter and plopped down at a chess table in the front room. He is small for his years—he is eight—and has curly brown hair and bright, alert eyes. Pandolfini was eager to show Fabiano some new rook and pawn endings, but Fabiano insisted on playing a game. Pandolfini chose a cramped formation called the French Defense, a fa-

vorite of Botvinnik's. Fabiano, a tenacious attacker, couldn't sit still while he played; he stood up or slung both legs up on the table, and stared off into space while Pandolfini was thinking. When Pandolfini moved, he responded instantly with a move of his own.

"The little machine is eating me alive," Pandolfini said, "but that pawn move can't be right. It weakens the dark squares."

"No, it doesn't," Fabiano said.

"Of course it does," Pandolfini said.

"No, it doesn't," Fabiano repeated.

"Fabiano's greatest strength," Pandolfini told me later, after Fabiano had lost the game, "is that he has the courage of his convictions. He is stubborn and sticks to his ideas, come hell or high water. That serves him well in tournament play—you need to believe in yourself—but it makes him harder to teach. When he has a misguided idea, it's not easy to talk him out of it."

Chess is a pursuit, like music or mathematics, in which natural talent is essential but must be cultivated. No one is born knowing how to checkmate a lone king with just a bishop and a knight, or when a rook can be sacrificed for counterplay. These are the kinds of skills Pandolfini shows his students during each lesson, customizing problems so that they stretch the student's ability and imagination but aren't so difficult that the kid gives up in frustration. He also reviews their recent tournament games, asking them why they made each move, and what they would have done had their opponents responded with different, stronger moves. He is out to correct errors in thinking, positions in which the student is convinced that he has pulled off a clever maneuver but has succeeded only because neither he nor his opponent saw a better response. In New York, it's easy to find a financially strapped chess master willing to give chess lessons, but finding one who likes to teach (and has Pandolfini's talent for it) is another matter. And many parents are relieved that Pandolfini is not bent on creating a chess champion. "Before Bruce, we had the type-A spouse of a grandmaster," the mother of one of Pandolfini's third-grade students said. "Then the brooding grandmaster himself. They were obsessed with the idea of making a prodigy."

Pandolfini's second lesson of the day

was nearby, in Windsor Terrace, at the home of Giancarlo Roma. Giancarlo, a fourth grader, was more respectful of Pandolfini than Fabiano had been, though his playing style was no less aggressive. They went over a game that Giancarlo had recently played on the Internet. He had used the Traxler Counterattack in the Two Knights Defense, a highly tactical line in which the slightest misstep can lead to a quick defeat. "You can get away with taking his pawns," Pandolfini said. "Pig out if you wish. There's nothing wrong with a little piggetry."

"When Bruce comes, we put out wine and cheese and then leave the two of them alone," Giancarlo's father, Tom, told me. "But I once sat at the top of the stairs and listened to the whole lesson. I find extreme beauty in the way Bruce describes chess moves, in the way he creates a story out of each game. I teach photography, and I've always told my students that chess is one of the highest art forms. But there's also something frighteningly narcotic about it. I don't want chess to overwhelm Giancarlo."

"I remember during the Fischer-Spassky match, Spassky was quoted as saying, 'Chess is like life,' and Fischer was quoted as correcting him, saying, 'Chess is life,'" Tom went on. "Fischer was cheating himself by taking the game that seriously."

In 1970, Pandolfini dropped out of graduate school—he was studying chemistry at the University of Arizona—to play in the National Open Championship in Reno, Nevada. "Needless to say, my parents weren't happy," he said. "My father knew how hard it was to make a living at chess, and my good Jewish mother wanted me to become a doctor or a lawyer. I had ended up studying to be a chemist because chemistry was the only A I got my first semester in college. But my heart wasn't in it."

At the National Open, he reached the last round tied for second place, only half a point behind the leader, the legendary grandmaster Larry Evans, a former United States champion and sparring partner of Bobby Fischer's. In the final, Pandolfini played Evans on Board One; if he pulled off an upset victory, he would tie for first place. They each had two hours to make their first fifty moves, but the position was so thorny—Pandolfini,

in what's now called the Grand Prix Attack, sacrificed his king's bishop pawn to open lines for an early assault on Evans's king—that both players consumed considerable time working through the maze of possibilities. By the end, they were in deep time trouble, and each had to make twenty moves in one minute. Dozens of spectators closed in around them, standing on chairs to get a better view.

"I kept glancing at the clock, watching the seconds tick away," Pandolfini said. "I had a winning game. In fact, I had four different ways to win. I saw this beautiful winning combination. Just as I reached out to make it, Evans offered me a draw, which wasn't fair, because I was thinking. The rules require that he offer a draw only when it's his turn to move. I don't think he was trying to bend the rules, but who knows? I think he was just nervous and afraid of losing. Anyway, I declined the offer. But my mind blanked. By accident, I still played one of the four winning moves. But it was the least good of the four. I managed by a miracle to pull off a perpetual check and draw the game."

Pandolfini ended up tied with five other people for third place. "My prize was fifty dollars, and I lost that at the blackjack tables that happened to be in my way as I walked back to my hotel room. 'Why am I doing this?' I asked myself. Here I had dropped out of school, driven hundreds of miles, and poured my heart into the game and gotten so little,

neither money nor satisfaction," he said.

Afterward, Pandolfini went to Berkeley to visit a chess-playing buddy from the Marshall, and found himself confronted with the same questions. "We were playing speed chess at two or three in the morning," Pandolfini said. "I won the first two games, but I didn't deserve to. In other words, he was clearly outplaying me, and I won through cheap tricks and gross blunders on his part. He was getting angrier and angrier. In the third game, he was outplaying me again, and once more he let his advantage slip. I began to feel terrible. Then I lost on time. He looked at me and said, 'Justice triumphs.' And I thought, Justice triumphs? He wasn't just making a statement. He really meant it—that he was the Just and I was the Unjust. I started to question whether I thought the same. Was I there just to beat him? Is that what it's all about? After that, I gave up tournament chess."

Pandolfini went back to New York, and, after a series of odd jobs, ended up working at the Strand bookstore. "The Strand was great because I love books," Pandolfini said. "But I certainly missed competitive chess, the thrill of coming up with a strong, unexpected move." One day after work in 1972, Pandolfini ran into Shelby Lyman, an old friend and fellow-master from the Marshall. "Guess what?" Lyman said. "We're going to cover the Fischer-Spassky match on PBS—live coverage five hours



"Enough storyboarding. Let's shoot something."

a day." An Albany studio of New York's Channel 13 would produce the show.

A few days later, Pandolfini got a call from Lyman's producer, Mike Chase, asking if he wanted to appear as a back-up chess analyst on the program. Chase couldn't afford to pay Pandolfini or put him up in a hotel, but he offered to reimburse him for his train fare to and from Manhattan. "I immediately agreed," Pandolfini said. "I don't know what came over me. I had to quit the job I liked at the Strand. It was three hours each way to Albany, and I had to make the trip every other day. I didn't anticipate that the job would turn into anything. I did it because I loved Bobby Fischer."

At the Marshall, Pandolfini had seen the young Fischer rummage through a musty index-card file of nineteenth-century games—King's Gambits and Evans Gambits, swashbuckling, incautious games for the player with the white pieces. "Fischer resurrected these very gambits to win the 1963-64 United States Championship," Pandolfini said. "I was a wall boy there, at the Henry Hudson Hotel, moving the pieces on giant demonstration boards so that chess fans in the back of the playing hall could follow the games. Now I wanted to be a part of history and watch him topple the Soviet champion."

The 1972 world-championship match was a classic Cold War battle: Fischer, who was twenty-nine, threatened to pull out, because he didn't like the playing conditions, and Henry Kissinger urged him to stay and fight on behalf of his country. The accompanying television show was a huge success, attracting millions of viewers who did not know how to play chess. Pandolfini's role in the coverage was minimal—Lyman did most of the talking—but he stood out because he had a shaggy, reddish-blond, shoulder-length Afro. "I was a real hippie at a time when that was starting not to be so cool anymore," Pandolfini said. "I wanted to cut my hair and look good, but the producer wouldn't let me. He said it was distinctive."

That summer, chess players became celebrities. "People would pull me over on the sidewalk and ask whether it was better to open with the king's pawn or the queen's pawn," Pandolfini said. "Once, I was walking on Sixth Avenue and a stretch limo pulled up. Out jumped



SKETCHBOOK BY STEVE BRODNER *Bush team players with corporate ties, and friends: Karl Rove (adviser), Mitch Daniels (Office of Management and Budget), Raymond Gilmartin (president, Edison Electric Institute), Dick Cheney, Charles Dolan (chairman, Cablevision), Charles designate). Bottom: Rick Wagoner (C.E.O., General Motors), Gale Norton (Interior), Don Evans*



and sponsors who want their help. Top, left to right: Tommy Thompson (Health and Human Services), Geoffrey Bible (C.E.O., Philip Morris), C.E.O., Merck), Ann Veneman (Agriculture), Mercer Reynolds (Ambassador designate). Middle: Andrew Card (chief of staff), Thomas Kuhn Jarwley (C.E.O., M.B.N.A. America Bank), Spencer Abraham (Energy), Kenneth Lay (chairman, Enron), Richard Egan (Ambassador Commerce), George W. Bush, Don Carty (C.E.O., American Airlines), Donald Rumsfeld (Defense), Vance Coffman (C.E.O., Lockheed Martin).

a gorgeous woman shouting, 'Bruce Pandolfini! Bruce Pandolfini! Oh, wow!' Shelby Lyman and I were in a restaurant in Manhattan, and Dustin Hoffman came up and said, 'Shelby, how are you?' 'Fine,' Shelby replied. 'Do I know you?' Now that I had been on national television, even my father was secretly proud that I had taken up chess."

During the Fischer-Spassky match, hundreds of people called Channel 13 requesting chess instruction. Pandolfini began giving fifteen of the callers lessons at fifteen dollars an hour. In these first lessons, he developed his signature teaching method of not allowing his students to touch the pieces until they had worked out the moves in their head. "I knew from my own experience playing blindfold through Russian games that this was the right way to teach," he said.

Three months after Pandolfini gave his first private lesson, he was charging as much as a hundred and thirty-five dollars an hour. In 1973, he taught the first chess course offered for college credit, at the New School. "I also taught a weekly course at the Manhattan House of Detention," Pandolfini said. "We met in the library. There were mass murderers in the class. One day there was a riot, and the guards sealed the building, trapping me in the library with twelve people, any one of whom could have killed me in a second. I was afraid that someone would say, 'Let's take the chess guy hostage.' I continued the class as if nothing had happened, and they all sat there in rapt attention."

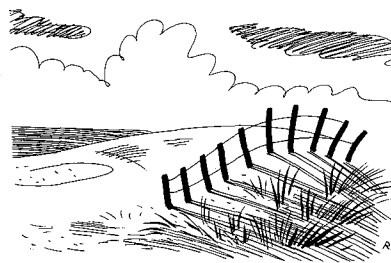
One afternoon not long ago, Pandolfini cancelled his chess lessons and joined me for a screening of "The Luzhin Defence," the recently released film version of Vladimir Nabokov's 1930 chess novel. As the credits rolled, Pandolfini joked that he suspected he would not get any new students from the film. Not only is Nabokov's chess teacher, Valentinov, an evil man, determined to undermine his student, Luzhin, but Luzhin finally goes mad—eating, sleeping, and thinking chess—and decides that the only way to save himself is to exit the game of life. He jumps out a window to his death.

Professional chess players are troubled by this image of themselves as eccentrics and madmen, and "The Luzhin

Defence" is only the most recent slight. "Chess-players once again have to come to terms with chess being depicted on screen as the mental equivalent of a dangerous drug," a review of the movie in *British Chess* said. And yet the magazine lamented the "alarming number" of real-life chess players who have killed themselves by jumping from windows or bridges: the Estonian grandmaster Lembit Oll, in 1999, the Latvian international master Alvis Vitolins, in 1997, the Armenian international master Karen Grigorian, in 1989, and the Russian international master Georgy Ilivitsky, in 1989.

In fact, research has shown that tournament chess takes an extraordinary toll on the body; blood pressure and breathing rates rise during a game, and a study at Temple University found that a chess player expends as much energy as a football player or a boxer. It's not hard to believe, then, that chess can also take a toll on the mind, pushing unstable psyches over the edge. "Any chess game contains a wide range of emotions, with joys and vexations, great and small," the grandmaster Genna Sosonko wrote last year in an essay called "The Jump." "This accompanies any type of creativity. But whereas in painting or literature, for example, it is possible to cross out, rewrite or change, in chess a movement of the fingers, communicated by the mind, is final: often it can be repaired only by sweeping the wooden pieces off the board."

"Let's face it, there are more unbalanced people in chess than in your average profession or activity," Pandolfini said to me. Chess culture is a haven for social misfits: it does not care how players dress or speak (or whether they can even speak at all), and it offers its own rich world, in which you need only chess skills to succeed. There are, after all, some eighty-five billion ways of playing just the first four moves, so no one can ever exhaust all the possibilities. A single CD-ROM called "ChessBase Mega Database 2001"



contains 1.7 million games played between 1601 and 2000, with additional games made available every week on the company's Web site. Clubs on the Internet allow chess addicts to find opponents at any hour of the day or night.

"People whose sense of self derives from how they do at chess, because they have so little else going on in their life, are the ones who are likely to crack up from the pressure of tournament play," Pandolfini said. "Fischer was a case in point."

After Fischer won the world championship, he went into seclusion with a fundamentalist group in California, became a zealous anti-Semite, and had various run-ins with the law. Members of the chess world waited for him to return, but all they got from him was a booklet entitled "I Was Tortured in the Pasadena Jailhouse," a diatribe about his incarceration after being mistakenly arrested as a bank robber. In 1992, Fischer was briefly back in the news, winning more than three million dollars in a rematch against Spassky in Yugoslavia, but he showed little of his earlier brilliance. He subsequently vanished again.

The chess world has changed since the nineteen-sixties. "In my day, chess was seen as a shady activity, something that street hustlers did," Pandolfini said. "It wasn't taught in any school then. Maybe just a few hundred kids played tournament chess, and many of them were eccentric. Today, chess is mainstream. My students play baseball and hockey. They go to summer camp and play the piano."

The improved image of chess is due in part to the efforts of Garry Kasparov, who was the world champion for fifteen years until he lost the title last November, to Vladimir Kramnik, his protégé. Kasparov is an urbane, well-spoken millionaire who is heavily involved with Russian politics and was once rumored to have a shot at succeeding Boris Yeltsin. Kasparov has worked tirelessly to establish scholastic chess programs in dozens of countries. He is so well known that Pepsi made him the star of a Super Bowl commercial in January. "Unlike Fischer or Morphy, Kasparov does not behave like he is on leave from an asylum," Pandolfini said.

And yet even Kasparov isn't entirely able to abide by social conventions: like Fischer, he can barely conceal the con-

QUARANTINE

In the worst hour of the worst season
of the worst year of a whole people
a man set out from the workhouse with his wife.
He was walking—they were both walking—north.

She was sick with famine fever and could not keep up.
He lifted her and put her on his back.
He walked like that west and west and north.
Until at nightfall under freezing stars they arrived.

In the morning they were both found dead.
Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history.
But her feet were held against his breastbone.
The last heat of his flesh was his last gift to her.

Let no love poem ever come to this threshold.
There is no place here for the inexact
praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body.
There is only time for this merciless inventory:

Their death together in the winter of 1847.
Also what they suffered. How they lived.
And what there is between a man and woman.
And in which darkness it can best be proved.

—Eavan Boland

tempt he feels for his opponents. Last November, Pandolfini was the master of ceremonies at a charity event in Manhattan, where Kasparov played twenty-one games simultaneously against amateurs. He had been dethroned as the world champion two weeks earlier, and it was the first time he had played in public since. He grimaced and growled when a boy offered him a draw in a position in which the boy stood much worse. Pandolfini tactfully warned the crowd that, if any draw offers were to be made, the champion would make them.

After nearly two hours, Kasparov had disposed of everyone except Nelson Farber, an attorney in his late thirties. Farber had managed to frustrate Kasparov's efforts to pull off one of his trademark flashy attacks. At one point, Kasparov stared, squinting, at the ceiling for several minutes, shaking his head disapprovingly. Farber sat there stoically, only to subsequently blunder in a position that looked dead even; when he finally acknowledged defeat, Kasparov broke into a wide grin and pumped his hand.

Pandolfini and I went out to dinner with Kasparov afterward, and I asked him whether Farber could have drawn the game if he hadn't made that error. "Of course," Kasparov replied. "For a moment before he blundered, I thought of offering him a draw. But I didn't like the way he looked. He was too smug and self-confident. I wanted to crush him."

Later, I told Farber that Kasparov hadn't offered him a draw because he looked too confident. "Confident?" Farber said. "That's ridiculous. I was scared shitless. There was a moment when we exchanged smiles. My smile was 'I'm happy to be here, amazed I lasted this long.' His smile was 'I'm going to kill you.'"

To succeed at tournament chess, you need to be aggressive. For Pandolfini's students to make it to the highest echelons of chess, they must have the determination to win at any cost—and they must be able to tolerate this unbridled ambition in themselves without being crushed by it in their oppo-

nents. Pandolfini had that determination, but he could not reconcile it with his image of himself. "Chess is art," Pandolfini said. "Chess is sport. But it's also war. You have to master on the order of a hundred thousand different chess ideas and concepts, patterns of pawns and pieces. That takes work. And you're going to lose a lot of games in the process, so you'll have to be able to make your peace with that, which isn't easy. Because there's no luck involved in the game, you have to face the fact that you lost because your opponent outwitted you."

"Ninety per cent of my students give up on tournament chess when they get into junior high school," Pandolfini continued, "and the main reason is that they can't stand losing. There are other reasons, too, like they discover girls. And yet they'll miss competitive chess. I still sometimes wonder whether my quitting was the right decision."

During the sixth and final round in Orlando, Adam Weser's parents and grandparents were camped outside the playing hall, praying that he'd forge a comeback and win. Bonnie read a book called "The Panic-proof Parent," and Matthew paced like a caged tiger.

"I don't understand why you put Adam through this," Bonnie's mother said. "I wouldn't do this to my children. And look at your husband—he won't stop walking or biting his fingernails."

"If I didn't let Adam play," Bonnie said, "he'd be a lot more upset."

This time, Adam's opponent once again surprised him on the very first move—pushing his queen's knight pawn forward two squares, the unusual Orangutan Opening—but Adam kept calm and built up a winning position. At last, he skipped out of the hall, his arms raised in victory.

"What's this?" Pandolfini said, reviewing Adam's score sheets. "You had the chutzpah to put four exclamation points after one of your own moves?"

"Yes," Adam said. "It's a brilliant move. Besides, it shook up my opponent."

He ran off, punching the air. At times like these, he has talked about playing chess until he can beat Bobby Fischer. "I wish I could fly," Adam once told his parents after a victory, "so that I could play chess with God." ♦

FICTION

GUNSMOKE

BY MARISA SILVER



My father has a gun and won't come out of his house. This is what a policeman is telling me over the phone, a cop who used to be the boy I slept with in high school. I haven't seen or heard from Bobby in nearly twenty years, but the stumble in his laugh makes me blush, reminding me of long silences and fast sex.

Bobby keeps talking. The bank has foreclosed on my father's house in the desert. He failed to make his payments, and the bank turned around and sold his land to a real-estate developer. The desert has become fashionable again—

magazine articles tell you it's "back," as though it had been hiding out somewhere all this time.

"He hasn't shot at anybody yet," Bobby continues. "But the chief's ready to escalate things."

"Meaning?"

"Throw some smoke in there and force him out."

"Jesus."

My father lives alone, in the same flat-roofed cabin he's owned since he left me and my mother when I was ten. Before he drove away, my mother took him aside and showed him how to run a

dishwasher. He is taciturn to the point of being rude. He's the kind of person who might decide not to do something for another person, not because of selfishness or meanness, but because he is uncomfortable being on the receiving end of gratitude.

Bobby tells me that he was made a sergeant on the force, and about somebody named Cindy and two kids.

"That's good news," I say. My gaze falls on my living room's single decoration: an unframed poster of a Hong Kong action film I've never seen. I found it on the street after a neighbor moved away.

JIM DOW/JANET BORDEN GALLERY

"It's nothing like you, Alice," Bobby says. "We saw you on TV, in that Greek thing."

I wince at the reference. I once had a bit part in a superhero-of-the-ancient-world television show. "That was eight years ago."

"You ought to let us know when you're on TV."

"I'm not on TV much."

"Well, you just let us know when you are."

Apparently, he has not heard me. Or maybe it's that stubborn way people from back home have of ignoring cynicism. I've spent seventeen years in Los Angeles, but it took me no time to discover that I'm no actor.

"You're doing movies now?" he asks.

"I do the voices in movies."

"Oh," he says, uncertainly.

"You know all those people drowning in 'Titanic'?"

"You were in 'Titanic'?"

"I was the screams of some of the people drowning. Also, some of the eating sounds in the dining-room scenes."

"Eating sounds?"

"I chew." I make a cheek-sucking sound. I stop abruptly. "It's a pretty good job," I say, apologetically.

He says nothing. The silence that follows is so long I wonder if he's still on the line, and I panic a little. "Bobby?"

"Listen, Alice. Are you going to get involved in this situation or not?" he says, sounding official again.

"I'll give him a call," I say.

"He's cut the phone lines."

"Shit."

The following morning, I drive out to my father's house. I usually visit him once a year. Last time, we drank a beer and walked around his property while he pointed out new earthquake fissures in the foundation. Then he spent forty-five minutes under the hood of my car, trying to fix a fifteen-year-old engine cough. He said, "You don't have to come all the way out here, Alice," and I said, "It's no trouble at all." He said goodbye with his hands stuffed in his pockets, and I drove home. This is how it is when I see him; it reminds me of the relief and disappointment of getting the same haircut over and over again.

I grew up in Palm Springs. Until the day before my mother died of a heart at-

tack, five years ago, she gave mud baths and heat treatments to rich tourists at a local spa. Each night, when she got home, she'd take a bath to wash off the smells of other people. Then she'd crack a head of iceberg lettuce on the edge of the kitchen counter and start making our dinner. She wore white soft-soled nurse's shoes that made no sound when she walked.

In the fifties and sixties, my father was a stuntman on television Westerns. His specialty was bulldogging—leaping from one horse to another and wrestling its rider to the ground. He once jumped from a moving train onto a wagon, climbed down from its roof, struggled with the driver, and drove the wagon down a steep hillside and across a river. By the end of his stunt career, he could do almost anything—fall off a saloon rooftop onto a moving horse carriage, dive from a cliff into a rushing river, ride underneath the belly of a horse. He always smelled of tangy saddle leather and horse sweat.

In the early seventies, my father was involved in an accident. He and another man were supposed to stage a fight on top of a wooden watchtower. At one point, my father was meant to trip and tumble off the tower, bringing the other man with him, so that they would fall together to the ground. The tower wasn't high, and both men were experienced. My father arrived at the set first and arranged the crash pads, and he and the other man worked out their moves. But something went wrong during the stunt. My father landed safely, but the other man lost his grip on my father, bounced off the landing rig, and came down on some sharp rocks twenty yards away. His neck snapped, and he died.

On the outer edges of Riverside, life gives itself over to the desert. Car dealerships and outlet malls cluster together, as though desperate for company. Small communities rise up and quickly give way to billboards and neat fields of hay and grain. The emptiness makes what is here stand out: miles of electrical cable hanging like necklaces between stanchions, and two life-size dinosaurs, part of an attraction that was abandoned long ago. I drive over a serpentine pass, and on the other side there are wind turbines by the hundreds—an army of

white pinwheels rotating slowly on tall stems. It's hard to imagine that their slow motion brings much electricity to the desert, but life out here has always thrived on little sustenance.

I head up into the high desert, toward the town of Twentynine Palms. I pass a gas station and a convenience store. There are trailer homes and low ranch houses scattered like driftwood, most of them fronted by tiny gardens of rubbery foliage. Farther on, the land becomes a rough carpet of cholla cactus and spiky Joshua trees.

A police cruiser is parked in the dirt driveway of my father's brown-sided cabin. The scene is less dramatic than the bad TV movie I'd expected. Two cops sit in the car. One reads a newspaper while the other sleeps, head tilted back against the seat. I start toward the cabin when the cruiser door swings open and out steps a barely recognizable Bobby, rubbing his eyes. His long half-miler's body has filled out with heavy muscles and the hint of a gut. His uniform grips him.

"Can I help you?" he asks.

"It's me. Alice."

He squints into the winter sun. "I didn't recognize you," he says. There's letdown in his voice. After hearing stories of my decade in the so-called fast lane, he expects something more than a weather-beaten woman in jeans and a wrinkled blouse.

"It's been a long time," I say.

He nods. His face has grown more angular. His eyes have narrowed, but his lips fall into the same natural pout that I used to find irresistible. I suddenly find myself thinking of the taste of his cigarette breath mixed with ham-and-cheese sandwich, his tongue exploring my mouth, eyes sleepy with desire. I feel a perverse and embarrassing connection to this stranger.

"Does he know I'm coming?" I say.

"He won't communicate with us."

I start for the kitchen door, but Bobby moves to block my path.

"I'm going to have to search you."

"You're kidding."

He gives me an unfriendly look, and I spread my legs and arms. He squats as he makes his way down my body, avoiding my breasts but not my inner thighs. His light-brown hair is speckled with gray, and glistens with sweat.

"This is a perk of the job, I guess," I

joke uncomfortably. He doesn't answer. I look out beyond the top of his head at the lot across the street where the armature of an oversized hacienda-to-be stands like a mastodon skeleton.

"All right," he says, standing up. "See what you can do. The guy who bought the land is on our butt every day."

I take a step toward the house when a window flies open and the barrel of a shotgun slides out. Bobby retreats behind the car.

"Dad?" I yell sharply. "Dad, it's me!"

Desert rats don't age well. My father seems more gecko than man when I meet him in the kitchen. At sixty-eight, he is fully gray, and age spots dot his high forehead like dollops of chocolate. His skin looks like it's about to peel off in big leathery strips.

"You usually call before you visit," he says. He's got a cowboy's build: compact and wiry, hips narrower than my own. A small shark could swim through his bowed legs. He stands across the room and studies me with eyes as bright as blue crystals.

"You usually have a phone."

"The police tell you to come get me out of my house?"

"I guess it isn't your house anymore." We're both silent. I look around the small kitchen. The counters are bare except for a set of aluminum canisters, arranged in descending size. One says "coffee," another "tea." The letters are scratched off the other two. A blue-and-white striped dish towel hangs over the oven handle. A clock in the shape of a daisy is nailed to the wall. He's hung a mirror above the sink and his shaving equipment and comb sit in a mug on the drainboard. He lives alone. He can shave wherever he wants.

"You have boxes somewhere?" I say. "I'll help you pack."

I start toward the basement for some boxes. He shifts his gun in his hands purposefully, and I stop.

"You gonna shoot me, Dad?" I look into his eyes. He doesn't seem crazed, just determined.

"I'm not interested in help, if that's all right with you, Alice."

"O.K.," I say. "Just put the gun down, then, will you?"

He lowers it to his side. We stand without speaking. "You hungry?" he says, finally.

"What?"

"I'll open up a couple of cans."

He sets his gun against the kitchen chair, opens a cupboard, and takes down two medium-sized cans. He roots around in a drawer, finds the opener, and sets to work.

"Soup O.K. with you?" he asks with his back to me. "I've run out of everything else."

I stare at the gun leaning there for the taking and consider my options. "Soup's fine," I say.

When he was twenty or twenty-one, my father came south from Grass Valley. He'd been working ranches since he was sixteen and had heard there was work down in L.A. He was good-looking and could handle a horse, and once he landed his first job the work came easily. Occasionally, I'll tune into a late-night rerun and catch a glimpse of him as a young man. In a battle between the Indians and the Army, he played people on both sides, dressing as a Comanche for one set of shots, then changing into a lieutenant's uniform for the other. In the edited show, there was a scene of a heavily made-up Indian pulling a soldier off a horse. The Indian stabbed the soldier in the chest with a knife at close range. The final two closeups of the victor and the vanquished revealed them both to be my father.

As a child, I didn't understand that none of this was real, and I thought my father was very brave. Once, when I was five, he overheard me bragging about him to a playmate. The next day, he took the training wheels off my bike and told me it was time to learn to ride a two-wheeler. The sidewalk outside our house was paved, but my father took me to our gravel driveway. I mounted the purple Schwinn while he held the back of the seat to steady me.

"Just be ready," he said quietly. I could feel his warm breath on my ear.

He gave the bike a shove and told me to pedal. I steered in a drunken weave for a few feet until I fell over, skinning my knees and my hands on the rough pebbles. I cried. He checked out my wounds, picked the bike up, and carried it with one hand back to the head of the driveway and set it up again. We went on like this for an hour, until I figured out how to make the bike go right when it wanted to go left, what to do



*"We're not doing anything for Gay Pride this year.
We're here, we're queer, we're used to it."*

when a rock took me by surprise and threw off my rhythm. I made it down to the end of the driveway and onto the smooth pavement without crashing. When I returned to my father, he looked down at me, unsmiling.

"You just have to be ready to change your plan," he said. "Bravery's got nothing to do with it."

"I'm sorry," I said.

He looked at me uncomfortably. "You ought not to go on about things like you do, Alice," he said.

My father's living room is decorated with castoffs from television shows. There's a rocking chair made out of rough-hewn bentwood, a couch with antlers for a headrest. The coffee table is a wooden wine barrel spattered with bullet holes from a bar fight. The pictures of cowboys and horses on the walls are dime-store reproductions.

The shades are drawn against the glare of the afternoon sun, and maybe against the police as well. My father sits in a chair in the dim light cast by a standing lamp. His shotgun lies across his lap.

"The house looks good," I say.

"Started sinking about a year ago. Drainage problem. I had to pour in a new foundation."

"That's a big job."

"I did the work myself." There is a silence.

"I hit some traffic on the way out," I say.

"Hmm?"

"There was a jam downtown where the 5 meets the 110, but after that things cleared up."

"That's a bad interchange. Always has been."

"Yes."

Outside, the police car starts its engine. I feel grateful for the interruption. I lift the curtain at the window. The car pulls out of the driveway and heads down the road.

"You can probably find a reasonable apartment in Palm Springs or Indio," I say, sitting down on the couch. The antlers poke into the back of my head. "You must have retirement benefits from the union."

He sighs heavily.

"I could make some calls for you."

"Phone's dead."

"Would you like me to make some calls for you, Dad?"

"Not really."

When I was nine and my father was still living at home, my mother suggested he take me to work with him. It was during the summer, and I had no school. The morning I was meant to go, my mother woke me hours before dawn. By the time I was down in the kitchen, my father was already in his jacket, tossing his car keys impatiently from one hand to another. My mother, still in her bathrobe, handed me a lunch she'd packed the night before.

We drove for nearly two hours in the dark. When my father turned off the highway, the sun was just beginning to lighten the sky to a dove gray. I didn't know where we were, but there were too many of the wrong kind of trees for us to be in the desert. Finally, we pulled off the road and parked in a dirt lot filled with cars and trailers. My father grabbed a wrinkled brown grocery sack from the back seat and I followed him through a haphazard cluster of trucks to a trailer filled with racks of clothing. Inside, my father introduced himself to a woman in a red sweatshirt. She had plastic bifocals hanging on a chain over her heavy chest.

"You're a full head shorter than your actor," she said. "But I guess it doesn't matter if you're on a horse."

She pawed through the clothes and came up with a pair of dusty brown pants and a checked shirt. "The shirt will hang on you. We can pin it up. We have only doubles, so save the blood for the money shots." She handed him a hat and some brown suede chaps. "You bring your own boots?"

He held up his paper sack. She looked at me and raised an eyebrow and looked back at her clipboard.

"She's just a visitor," my father said.

I waited outside a portable bathroom while he changed into his costume. He emerged—along with a blast of urine and powerful disinfectant—looking like a cowboy. His chaps swung loosely around his legs. His hat sat back perfectly on his head. His street clothes and shoes were bundled neatly under his arm.

I followed him past people drinking from Styrofoam cups of coffee. He didn't stop to greet anyone. He led us to a horse trailer, found two wooden apple boxes, and told me to sit on one. I could

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smell hay and manure. The sun rose higher in the sky. People continued to amble back and forth, some shouting orders into walkie-talkies. Men carried cameras and heavy cables off trucks and dragged them away on dollies. Everybody smoked. My father had a newspaper which he read, down, I suspect, to the advertisements for hair implants. He got up once or twice to straighten his outfit or to get himself another cup of coffee. The day heated up, and he began to sweat under his hat, but he did not take it off.

At last, a man with a walkie-talkie beckoned impatiently to my father, who stood up and adjusted his chaps. We headed off after the man, climbing a path up a small hill. On the other side, people in Western costumes sat in deck chairs, smoking, reading magazines, or talking to one another. My father motioned for me to stand to the side and he continued toward the people, until he was out of sight. When I saw him again, he was on a horse, wearing a holster, the silver handle of a gun showing inside it. The horse was skittish and my father had to work to get it settled, but he was an expert rider and soon the horse's high, nervous steps fell under his control. A man on the ground talked and pointed and then my father trotted the horse away behind a stand of trees. A few minutes later, he rode out from behind the stand at full gallop. The crowd stopped talking as the horse reared up and my father slid off its back, doing a full flip and landing on his stomach.

Immediately, people started talking again, as if nothing had happened. My father got up, dusted himself off, and led his horse to the side, where he stood passively as a woman fluffed his hair. The lady from the costume trailer came over and fiddled with his pant legs and tucked his oversized shirt into his waistband. It embarrassed me to see him touched so intrusively. When the women were finished, my father mounted the horse and disappeared behind the trees again. A voice called, "Action!" and my father rode in at a gallop. Then someone yelled, "Gun!" and my father grabbed his chest. Blood poured out between his fingers as the horse reared up. My father flipped and landed on his belly—a perfect fall. I waited for him to get up. But he didn't move. There was blood on the ground beneath his chest.

"Dad!" I screamed. I ran over to him,

holding his shoulders and shaking him.

"There's a kid in the shot!" someone yelled. "We have to go again!"

My father rolled over and sat up. He looked at all the people staring down at us. I could see his shame, and I realized my mistake.

"I thought you were hurt," I said.

"I'm not hurt," he hissed under his breath. "Go stand where I told you." The horse wrangler and the wardrobe lady converged on him, and he stood and walked away from me without looking back.

My father is sleeping with his head tilted back against the easy chair. His mouth is open, and I can hear the air pass through his throat like dry wind. I'm thinking about old boyfriends. My last one, Martin, left about four months ago. He was thin, thinner than me, and holding him I felt ungainly and exposed. The relationship left me with the impression that I was always speaking too loudly in a small room. I didn't believe he was serious when he asked me to marry him, and so I said yes, and the next thing I knew we were driving down to Baja to get married. When we stopped at the border checkpoint, Martin placed a hand on my knee and asked me what I was thinking. I told him I wanted to be in one of the cars going in the opposite direction.

"You still here?" my father says, surprising me. He sighs deeply and pulls himself taller in his chair. He checks his watch.

I stand up and peer out the closed drapes.

"They back yet?" he asks.

"No."

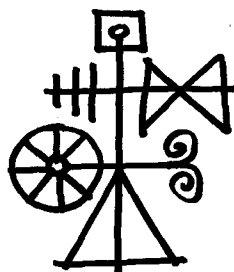
"Long lunch."

I let go of the drapes and turn around. He looks me over.

"You acting anymore?" he says.

"Not much. I'm doing voice work. Stunt talking."

He smiles. "I never thought you'd make a very good actor."



The comment rattles me. "I wish you'd said something a couple of decades ago," I say, trying for a joke. "You could have saved me a lot of hassle."

"It wasn't for me to say what you should or shouldn't do."

"What made you think I'd be no good at it?"

"Actors," he says, "need to be loved."

I feel like he's looking at me naked.

"Do you ever get lonely out here?"

The hair on the top of his head is thinning. His scalp is freckled and mapped with veins. My stomach knots up at the thought of a revelation.

"Not once," he says, reminding me that I'm an unnecessary distraction.

I knew the man who died in the accident my father was involved in. His name was Dan Radley. He was a stuntman, like my father, and he and my mother had an affair for a year before my father left my mother. I was too young to know about it. I thought Dan came around to help my mother out with heavy chores when my father was away on television jobs.

Dan wore a diamond as big as a gambling die on his pinkie finger and told jokes that he had written down in a small black notebook. He'd fish the book out of his shirt pocket and call me over. "Why is six afraid of seven?" he'd ask, and, before I could answer he'd say, "Because seven ate nine. Get it?" He'd wink and give me a swat on the bottom. When he told my mother a joke, they'd back away from me, into another room. I'd hear her say, "Oh, Dan. You're bad," as though she were reprimanding him, but the pleasure in her thick voice was unmistakable.

Dan was loud; the whole house filled up with the sound of him. He was from Canada, and he would tell us about the curling team standings, which he kept up with through relatives back in Edmonton. Sometimes we'd get a broom and a pot lid and play a game in the kitchen, while my mother complained lightly about her scuffed floors. He drank only imported beer. After he visited, my mother would collect the glasses and wash them in extra-hot water, then tell me to throw the bottles in the neighbor's trash, because our cans were full.

When my father came home and told us about the accident, my mother collapsed to the floor. My father stood

for a moment before going to help her. Looking back on it, I don't know if he realized then what had been going on, or if he had known for some time. He helped her up and steered her to the couch, where she lay on her side with her knees to her chest and her back to us. He covered her with a crocheted blanket, filled a glass of water, and set it on the table in front of the couch. Then he sat down heavily on the chair next to it.

"I could feel him lose his balance when he stepped off the tower, but I couldn't fix it. I thought I was ready. . . ." He dropped his head into his hands and his voice trailed off. My mother whimpered from the couch.

The family of Dan Radley sued the television company. My father was named in the suit. A lawyer from the union came out to the house to prepare him for his day in court. My father sat in a chair in the living room, and my mother and I stood by the door.

"Who came up with the stunt in question?" the lawyer asked, pacing back and forth in front of the chair.

"Falling off the tower was in the script. Dan and I came up with how to do the jump."

"No," the lawyer interrupted. "You don't say that. You say the production company came up with the jump."

"The production company?" my father said. "What'd they have to do with it?"

"They paid for the show," the lawyer said. "Everything that happened on the show is their responsibility. Who rigged the crash pad?"

"I did."

"No," the lawyer said impatiently. "That's not the right answer. The right answer is you did it according to the instructions of the movie production company."

"I'm not going to go laying the blame on someone else," my father said.

"Don't say 'blame,'" the man said, growing heated. "No one is accusing you of rigging the pad wrong. The crash pad worked fine for you," he said.

My father looked down. The man softened his tone. "Can you describe for the court the way in which Mr. Radley took his fall?"

My father looked up at the man but didn't speak for a moment. "No," he said, at last.

"You have to answer the questions or you'll be held in contempt."



"Can you recommend a large-breasted Burgundy with a big behind?"

My father rubbed his chin with the heel of his hand. "A man ought to be able to die without people speaking poorly of him," he said, finally.

My mother disappeared down the hall. After the accident, my father didn't work as much. At first, he made excuses for turning down jobs. Later, he just didn't answer the phone or return calls. He didn't trust himself. Twice, I found him standing outside our house, staring up at the roof or out at the horizon. Some months later, he moved away, up into the desert, exiling himself from the dual failures of his marriage and his job.

I'm driving in my car. I told my father I was going to the store to get something decent to eat. In truth, I don't know where I'm heading. It's nearly five o'clock, and in the late-winter sun the distant mountain peaks glow a soft pink. A moment later, a tepid blue-gray color settles into the sky. A few miles down the

highway, I pass Bobby in his civilian S.U.V., headed in the opposite direction. We both slow as we pass. In my rearview mirror, I see that he has stopped his car. I stop, too, and wait as he expertly backs up the few hundred feet until he is alongside me. He's changed out of his uniform and into jeans and a sweater.

"Back to the city?" he asks.

"To the store, to make some phone calls. I'll try to find a place for him in Indio."

"If he's not out of there by tomorrow morning, we'll have to come in and get him."

His tone irks me. "When did you become such an asshole?"

"This is procedure," he says. "We could have your father in jail in one hour, if you'd rather things went that way."

"Jesus, Bobby. With that kind of attitude, you should be working for the L.A.P.D."

He finally cracks a smile. "There's

a phone over at the Boot and Saddle."
"Where's that?"

"It's where I'm going." He accelerates and heads off. I pull out and follow his taillights.

At the bar, I call a few retirement complexes listed in the phone book, but it's past five, and the offices are closed for the day. I hang up and head toward the bar, where Bobby is seated next to an empty stool.

"Where's Cindy Two Kids?" I say, sliding in beside him and signalling for a beer.

"It's our night off."

"She's meeting you here?"

"Our night off from each other."

I look at him, trying to understand what he means.

He takes a drink of his beer. "It's her idea. She says we're in a rut, that we need to bring new experiences into the marriage. She joined a book group. She brings home books. I'm supposed to read them."

"I don't remember you being much of a reader."

He smiles and looks at me in a way that makes me uncomfortable.

"So your contribution is to bring home experiences from the bar?" I say.

He doesn't smile. "She thinks I'm at the movies. I can't go home until ten-thirty or things will look bad."

"Doesn't she want to know what movie you've seen? For discussion purposes?"

"I check out the papers and see what's playing. You see who the stars are and what the ad looks like, and you pretty much get the gist of the story."

I laugh. He shrugs, bashfully proud.

"Where are the kids?"

"They sleep over at her mother's. Cindy and I are supposed to, you know, get together when we come home." He looks at his beer.

"Is that after the Great Books discussion or before?"

He shakes his head, a little sadly.

"Well," I say. "Maybe she's right. Maybe things will perk up."

He takes a sip of his drink.

"Want to go to a movie?" he says.

"Make an honest man out of me?"

This takes me by surprise, and I laugh. Beer comes out of my nose.

"That's nice, Alice. No wonder you can't land a husband."

"Fuck you, Bobby," I say lightly.

We grab a much read paper from the end of the bar and scan the movie listings. We decide to drive all the way to Palm Springs in order to see a terrible teen flick I did voice work on a year ago, but which was so bad it is only now being released. Bobby drives his car and I sit back with my window open, letting the cold night air slap me awake. The drive goes faster than I expect, and soon we're sneaking into the middle of the film, trying not to disturb the trickle of kids who've come out to see it on a

weeknight. I fill Bobby in on the plot, which is so inane that the two of us start giggling into our popcorn, and a couple of teen-agers turn around in their seats and swear at us.

"Just tell me when you show up," Bobby whispers loudly.

"Not yet," I say. "There should be a party scene."

I glance over at him in the darkness. He's watching the screen with delight. A loud rock-and-roll song starts up.

"The party scene!" Bobby whispers excitedly.

I watch carefully. "O.K., there!" I say, pointing as the camera lingers on a group of gossiping teen-age girls. "I'm the voice of the blonde."

"Where?" Bobby asks, sitting up.

"You missed it," I say, as the camera floats away from the girls. "O.K., there, there!" I say, as the camera passes a girl and a boy laughing. "That's my laugh."

"That's your laugh!" Bobby repeats, amazed.

"O.K., right here," I say, as the scene settles on the lead couple.

"That's you talking?" Bobby whispers.

"No. Wait. Just wait."

The couple leans in for a kiss. It is a wet, sloppy teen-age kiss that goes on for a long time. "That's my kissing sound," I say.

"No way!" Bobby says, wide-eyed.

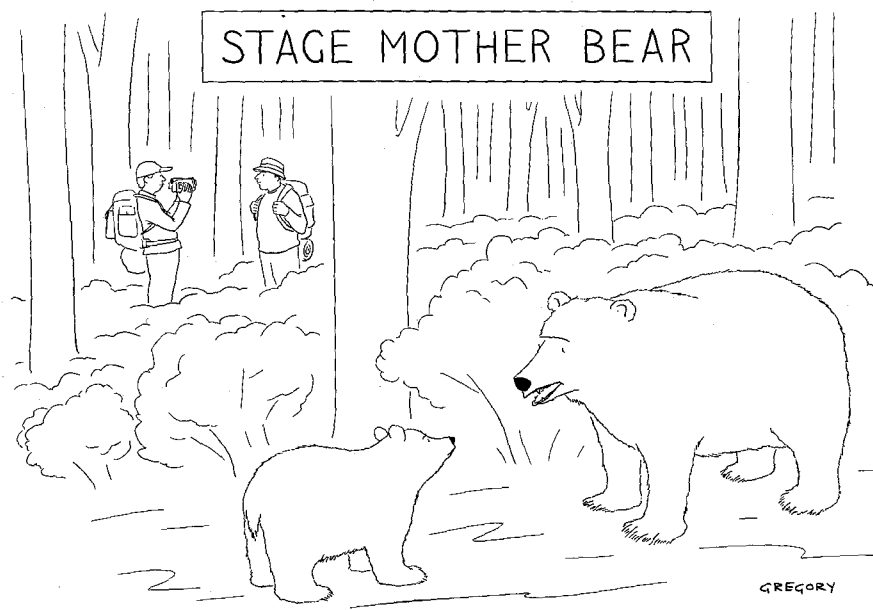
I nod, actually feeling proud. "Tongue and everything."

Bobby looks back at the screen. He starts to yell. "Here's the girl who did the kiss—"

I slap my hand over his mouth before he can go further, but he keeps trying to talk, his lips moving against my palm. I'm laughing and he's struggling to get free of me. Finally, he gives up and falls against the back of his seat. I take my hand away, but he reaches up and pulls it to his mouth. I feel the hot wet mist of his breath on my palm. His tongue licks my skin.

Within minutes, we're in his car, unbuckling and unsnapping and then we're in a motel on top of an orange bedspread. Neither of us makes a noise or looks the other in the eyes.

He gives a final heave and falls into me with the whole weight of his body. He stays there for a long time, breathing heavily into the curve of my neck. He moves off me and I turn onto my stom-



"Go for the one with the camcorder."

ach. I hear the sound of clothing being pulled on, zipped up, the clack of a belt buckle. I think: don't talk. I want to be past this moment before it has a chance to happen.

"Alice—"

"Well," I say, sitting up quickly and cutting him off, "here's to bringing home new experiences."

I wake up in the middle of the night on the antler couch in my father's living room. A blanket covers me, although I have no memory of having got it or the pillow under my head. The insides of my thighs are raw. I wrap my blanket around me and am heading toward the bathroom when I hear the sound of the television coming from my father's room. His door is ajar, and I look through the crack. He is sitting on the edge of his bed in his pajamas, watching the television on the bureau.

I knock and push open the door. He looks up, then back at the television.

"I don't sleep as much as I used to," he says.

I lean against the wall and pull the blanket around my shoulders. He's watching a rerun. I see James Arness and realize it's "Gunsmoke." My father used to do stunts for that show. I wonder if I'd recognize him. There's a shootout on the street, and Marshal Dillon is chasing down a bad guy. The bad guy shouts something, and I watch his mouth, listening to hear if his lines had been revoiced by people like me. When the bad guy gets shot, he flips and falls off his horse, narrowly avoiding its hooves as it gallops over him. I look to see if the stuntman could be my father. It's not. The screen goes dark before the commercial, and I see the faint reflection of my father's face in it.

"In the old days," my father says, "you weren't allowed to stand on the set next to your actor. If they caught you anywhere near him, they'd fire you on the spot."

"Why?" I say.

"You were the stuntman," he said. "You weren't supposed to exist."

When I wake up the next morning, my father is standing at the window in the kitchen, holding the curtain open with the barrel of his gun. Three cruisers are in the driveway, cops crouching behind the cars. I see the top of Bobby's

head. A local television truck idles farther off. A man hoists a video camera onto his shoulder and begins filming a well-dressed female reporter as she speaks into her microphone.

"They sent out the cavalry this time," my father says. His eyes scan the driveway, following the movements of the police. A squeezed and amplified bullhorn announces, "This is your final warning. Please vacate the house now!"

"All right," my father says.

"What are you going to do?" I say, alarmed. His body is taut, and I can see the muscles in his arms, the strength of his back.

He cocks his gun.

"Dad!"

"Get down on the floor, Alice."

I fall to my stomach, my cheek pressing against the cool wood, and inch myself under the kitchen table. Within the rush of adrenaline, I also feel perversely calm, as if I could stay here forever. A window shatters. I tense up, waiting for the volley of shots. My father's footfalls are heavy on the wood floor. His scuffed cowboy boots cross my line of sight. I follow, crawling on my belly, to the living room doorway, where he stops. There's a shattered window behind the antler couch, glass strewn across the worn leather. A cannister lies in the middle of the floor and smoke hisses out from it. My father stares at the smoke, holding the gun to his chest. He turns back to the kitchen.

"Dad," I say. "What should we do?"

"Nothing," he says. He lays the gun on the kitchen table. "I'm all played out."

He walks over to the sink and looks at himself in his shaving mirror. He lifts a hand to his chin and feels the stubble there. I walk up behind him.

"I look like a guy who's been holed up in his house for too long."

"You look all right."

I study my own hard face.

"Dad?"

"What is it, Alice?"

"Nothing," I say. I want to ask him what happens to people like us, people who hide out in strangers' voices and bodies. "Nothing," I say again, watching my own mouth in the mirror.

"Come on, Alice," he says. "Let's go."

He opens the kitchen door and we walk out into the white morning. ♦

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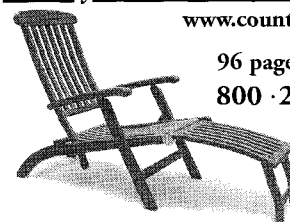


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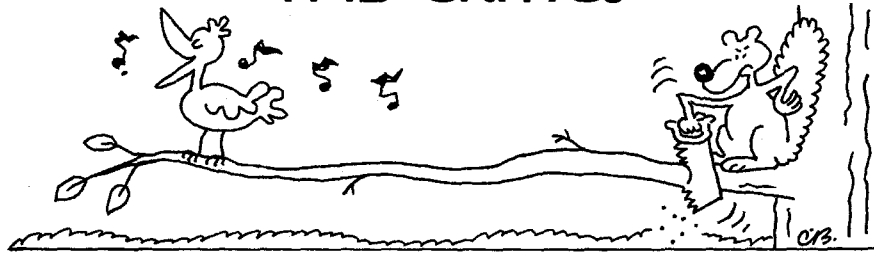
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THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

BOMBS AWAY

Love and rivalry in "Pearl Harbor."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The last Michael Bay film, "Armageddon," was a handy guide to what you should do when an asteroid bumps into your planet. At the time, most critics scorned the picture as deafening and dumb; in retrospect, it feels like a mature, even witty, exercise in self-reference, considering that the effect of watching a Michael Bay film is indistinguishable from having a large, pointy lump of rock drop on your head. His new picture, "Pearl Harbor," maintains the mood, pulsing with fervor as it tells a tale familiar to every child in America: how a great nation was attacked and humbled by the imperious pride of Ben Affleck.

He plays Rafe, a dyslexic Tennessee farm boy who has loved flying ever since he was old enough to crash. At least, I think he's from Tennessee; his accent takes a patriotic tour of several states, as if to indicate that the noble Rafe could have come from just about anywhere. His best buddy is Danny (Josh Hartnett); they join the Air Force together and play chicken in the skies over Long Island, much to the admiring wrath of Colonel Doolittle (Alec Baldwin), one of several real-life figures in the movie. Rafe is a young man of unusual courage. For one thing, he volunteers to be shipped to England to serve in the R.A.F. For another, he chooses the eve of his departure to inform his new girlfriend, an Air Force nurse named Evelyn (Kate Beckinsale), that he will not make love to her just now, on the ground that he wants to save something for later; this sacrifice, which leaves Evelyn looking a

little huffy, makes Rafe unique in the annals of human warfare. She is posted to the heat of Pearl Harbor, where she sits and reads letters from a shivering Rafe. What a tribute to the forces of love; our hero's dyslexia, chronic though undiagnosed, cannot stop him writing to his beloved, or avidly reading the sheaves that come in return.

Life in Hawaii is sweet for Evelyn, as indicated by the large number of pineapples that are randomly distributed around the set. She has time to sit by the shore in natty little two-piece swimsuits, dreaming of Rafe and presumably trying not to notice Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr making out in the adjoining cove. Medical duties are light, composed mainly of soothing the scalded butts of zealous sunbathers and stitching the wounds of a young cook and boxer—another real-lifer, Dorie Miller (Cuba Gooding, Jr.), who becomes the first black sailor to be awarded the Navy Cross. (After his gotta-be-the-best diver in "Men of Honor," Gooding is fast running out of water-based trailblazers.) This is one of those long but bitty movies in which actors get their characters handed out like parcels of rations—a nervous tic for you, a knot of frustration for him. Evelyn and the other nurses are delighted with a gang of fliers who are assigned to Pearl Harbor; we get Gooz (Michael Shannon), a fellow of few words and many bruises, Red (Ewen Bremner), who has a comedy stammer that you just know will kick in at a vital juncture, and,

above all, Rafe's friend Danny. Uh-oh.

The moment he appeared, looking shy and sculpted, my radar picked up a large, aggressive plot twist steaming in from the northwest. When news arrived that Rafe was missing in action, presumed dead, after being shot down off the coast of England, I switched to full alert. Soon enough, Danny's attempts at consolation melt into drinks, illicit flights at dusk over the ocean, and the urge to do on a bed of parachutes what Rafe declined to do at a perfectly comfortable hotel in New York. And then, of course, Rafe turns up, back with his unit, alive and well and deeply pissed to see his friend and his girl going hula to hula. And then, to make matters worse, thousands of these Japanese guys turn up, although, as far as we know, few of them are driven by a specific wish to go out with Kate Beckinsale. In fact, observing this movie, I am not sure *what* they want; Michael Bay, whose passion for geopolitical history tends to be exceeded by his interest in fireballs, gives the enemy a dramatic shrift so short that even the most red-blooded American viewers may feel a trifle embarrassed. If your movie is three hours long, with minor characters packed like sardines into every nook, you should perhaps find space for a young Japanese pilot—a name to go with a face. And, if your budget is a hundred and thirty-five million dollars, you might consider something more sophisticated than a shot of the Japanese high command huddled over a small swimming pool, watching models of American ships being poked around with a rod.

To be fair, Bay does pay elaborate homage to the niceties of Japanese weaponry. Long before I saw "Pearl Harbor," I was told to look out for the in-bomb camera, but that's not quite how it works; we don't perch on the nose so much as trail tightly behind, so that we can feel the whirring air and watch the looming target. Bay makes a fetish of the tiny propeller at the bomb's rear, gazing with kinky horror as it spins and then stops. He cuts away, holds for a microsecond, then delivers the bang and the boom. This blend of the minutely detailed and the enormously lurid is like the degraded fallout of a Pop Art sensibility; think of Lichtenstein and Rosenquist, of big pleading faces and fighter planes, then

VICTOR UJASZ



Kate Beckinsale as a sexy but saintly nurse and Ben Affleck as the dyslexic pilot who loves her, in Michael Bay's new movie.

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strip away the enamelling of irony, and you are left with the customized weirdness of the summer war movie, in which all strife is a blast.

Needless to say, "Pearl Harbor" works like a demon to pretend otherwise. We are offered regular sermons, notably from Alec Baldwin in his briefings and from Kate Beckinsale in a final voice-over, on the principles of combat and the lessons of loss; and our eyes are averted to Washington, D.C., where a staunch F.D.R. (Jon Voight) urges his countrymen first to vigilance and then to arms. On the other hand, it must be said that a Washington in which Dan Aykroyd plays an expert in naval intelligence is not a Washington that would enjoy one's undivided confidence. Still, that is not Bay's field; his field is the buckling deck of the U.S.S. Arizona, her white-clad inhabitants blown through the air like exploding angels, and the vertiginous tilt when she groans over and starts to sink. As the men slid to the water, I realized that the model for "Pearl Harbor" was not other war films but James Cameron's "Titanic": not the sober, battle-by-numbers approach of "Tora! Tora! Tora!" but the entwining of special effects and a love story that hopes, by sheer stamina, to grow special itself. To complain that the digital work in "Pearl Harbor" feels cold and gray is not saying much, given that the movie is about battleships; nevertheless, too much of the hardware—the toppling gantries, the Japanese Zeros that breed like rabbits in the air—is flattened by a matte dullness, like a kid's set of see-through stickers.

After the onslaught of false textures, it comes as a relief to take refuge in the look of the living, not least in the face of Kate Beckinsale, who is filmed with rapturous care. She comes on the heels of Nicole Kidman in "Moulin Rouge," another alabaster goddess who calms a hectic film; staring at the pair of them, I get a pleasant, goosebumpy feeling that, if nothing else, mid-2001 will go down as the summer of skin. There is no doubt, of course, which of the boys will wind up with Evelyn, a woman at once so sexy and so saintly that she removes a stocking in the middle of the bombing raid to make an emergency tourniquet, causing me to wonder whether the patient's blood pressure is supposed to go

up or down; what surprised me was how long it took for the winning lover to emerge. As Pearl Harbor lay smoldering, and the triumphant Japanese admiral uttered the words "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant," I got up to leave. After all, that was pretty much the line that brought "Tora! Tora! Tora!" to a close. Then I glanced at my watch, sighed, and sat down again; forty-five minutes still to go, and we're off into an entirely new narrative, with Alec Baldwin recruiting the boys for yet another mission. "Do you know what top secret is?" he asks—the second-best question of the film, topped only when Evelyn finds Rafe packing a suitcase, and, quick as a flash, says, "Packing?" She is understandably distraught by her sudden change of fortunes. One moment she is trying to cope with two grown men scrapping over her like a couple of roosters, and the next, as she says in some exasperation, "All *this* happened." I am not absolutely sure what she means by "this," but I imagine that she is referring to the trifling matter of an enraged United States being hauled into a global conflict. I guess we should thank Michael Bay for so bold a revisionist take on the Second World War: no longer the clash of virtuous freedom and a malevolent tyranny but a terrible bummer when a girl is trying to get her dates straight.

What Rafe is setting off for—complete with Danny, a Silver Star, and a fresh head of highlights—is the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo, in the spring of 1942, when bombers were launched off the deck of a carrier. It's a great saga, and I applaud movies that take the trouble to sing the unsung, but it doesn't belong here, and the audience started to rustle with impatience—something I never expected to hear at a movie directed by Michael Bay and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer. Why did they go with this plan? Maybe Jerry sidled up to Michael halfway through the shoot and whispered, "Bad news. I just learned that this Hawaiian thing—with the planes and the ships, right?—well, it wasn't so great for us. Apparently, the Japs won. We *lost*." So they tacked on another story, and went out on a high. "Pearl Harbor" may be stirring proof that right will prevail, but I hate to think what will happen when these guys get their hands on "King Lear." ♦

DARK STAR

The intimate grandeur of Vija Celmins.

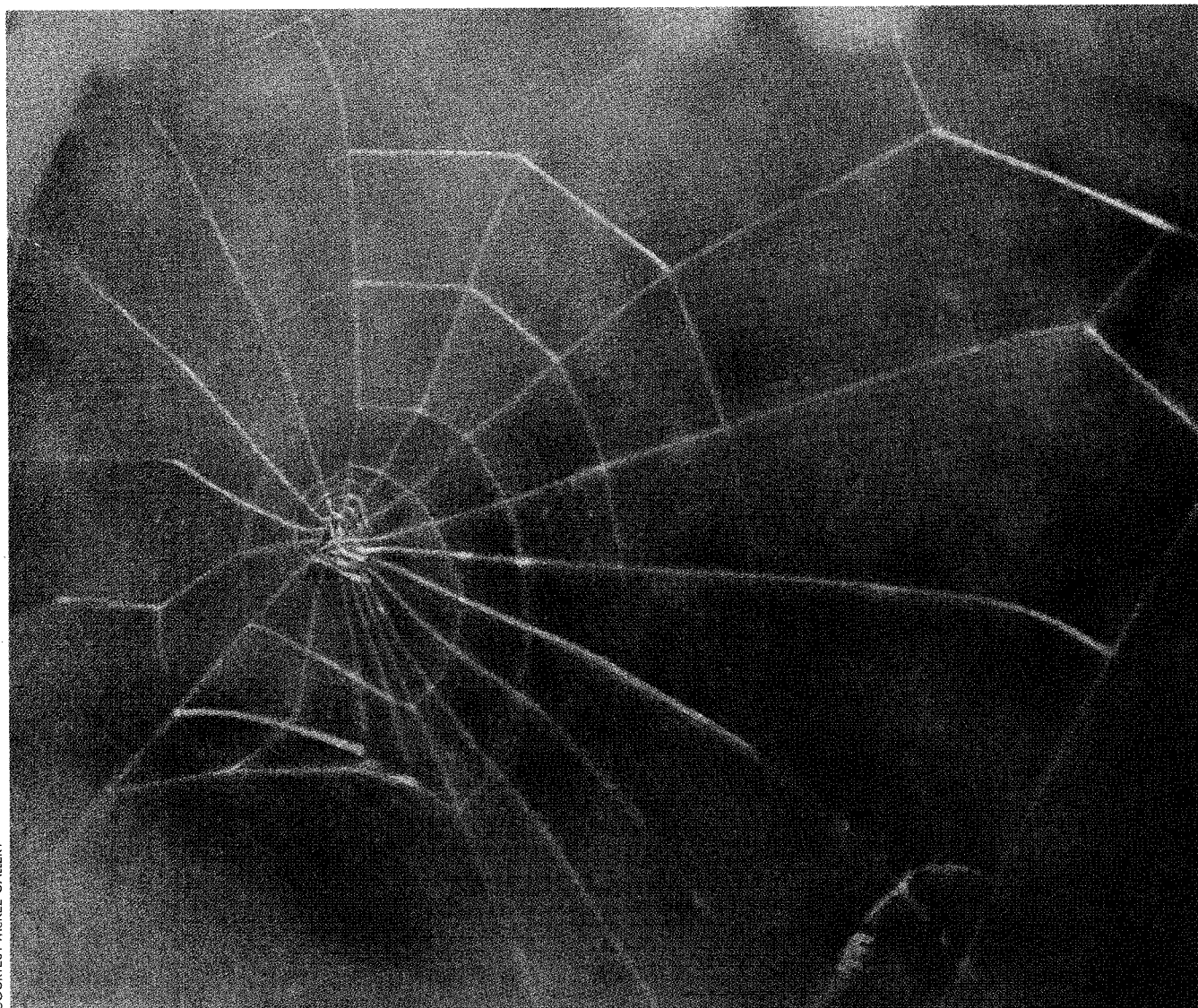
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

If I were stranded on a desert island and could have only one contemporary art work, it would be a picture of a starry sky, a spiderweb, or a choppy ocean by Vija Celmins—a smallish painting, drawing, or print that is sombre, tingling with intelligence, and very pure. I imagine that the work's charge of obdurate consciousness would give my sanity a fighting chance against the island's lonely nights, insect industry, and engirdling, unquiet waters. Celmins,

who is sixty-two, is the least well-known major figure of a generation that includes Edward Ruscha in Los Angeles, where she spent formative years, and such old friends as Chuck Close and Brice Marden in New York. Her low profile becomes her. An art-lover's artist, she inspires proprietary passion in her admirers. She seems as immune to public fame as the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi, whose hushed still-lives move the world one solitary viewer at a time.

Her eight paintings and six prints in a beautiful show at the McKee Gallery, which will run until June 22nd, represent the artist in top form, casting a hermetic spell that can seem at once too deep and too obvious for words.

Celmins is a painter of nature who operates at a considerable distance from her subjects. She works from clippings of reproduced, usually black-and-white photographs, some of them decrepit or blurry, and builds her labor-intensive paintings with many glazed and sanded layers of alkyd or oil on wood-backed linen. An early pioneer of Photo-Realism—like Close, and akin to the great German Gerhard Richter—she has convincingly demonstrated that photography, far from being the “death of painting,” can give the medium a foundation on which to reestablish its exclusive powers. The force of her work



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“Web I” (2000): Celmins’s spiderwebs are symbols of a spirit that operates beyond the frontiers of normal perception.

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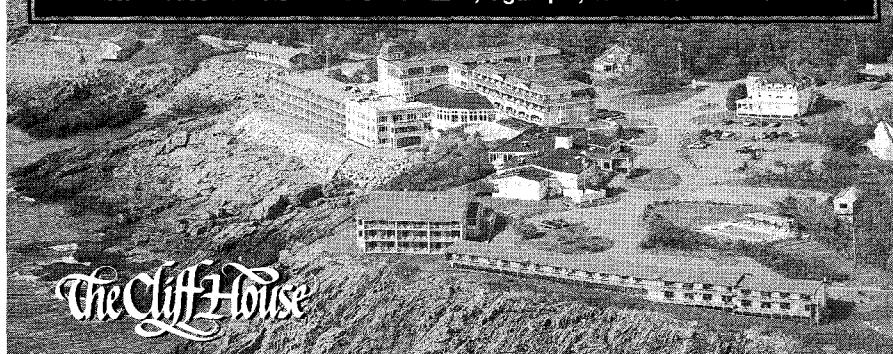
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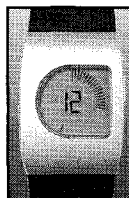
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does not come through in reproduction: you have to be there. With subtle effects of texture and captured light, her starscapes at McKee register as physical objects even as they convey infinity. You see that the "stars" are dots of white and gray paint and not distant suns, and that grayish washes are something more tangible than the nebulae or the fogs of terrestrial light which they suggest. You may reflect that each picture represents a tiny fragment of even the visible firmament, but its integrity makes for a satisfying sense of wholeness. This is a miracle of every successful painting: a world at a glance. Celmins's starscapes dramatize it with their intimate treatment of the largest possible subject. The double sensation of humility and grandeur is at once thinner and sharper in her superb prints. To evoke the spongy blackness of deep space she employs the rare technique of mezzotint, which is produced by burnishing a uniformly roughened copper plate. Her woodcuts of rumpled ocean surfaces stun. Their enraptured precision recalls the musical tapestries of Philip Glass, and, I like to think, brings a collegial smile to the spectral lips of Albrecht Dürer.

Celmins was born in 1938, in Riga, Latvia. In 1991, she described her childhood to Chuck Close: it was, she said, "full of excitement and magic, and terror, too—bombs, fires, fear, escape—very eventful." She went on, "It wasn't till I was ten years old and living in the United States that I realized living in fear wasn't normal." A church agency brought her and her family to America. They eventually settled in Indianapolis, where she attended art school. In 1961, she won a scholarship to Yale's summer-school art program; there, she met Close and Marden. Travelling in Europe, she was astonished by her first face-to-face exposure to Velázquez, in the Prado. "I remember remembering those paintings for a long while," she told Close. After moving to Los Angeles, in 1962, she began to paint moody, oddly Velázquez-like still-lives of things in her studio—a lamp, a hot plate, a space heater—and a view of the freeway from a snapshot that she took in her car. (That sun-bleached roadscapes strikes me as the all-time, definitive Los Angeles painting.) Early memories reemerged in images of fire

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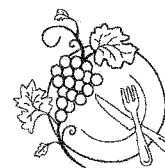


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## A CRITIC AT LARGE

## IN BLACK AND WHITE

*Chester Himes takes a walk on the noir side.*

BY HILTON ALS

I think the *only* function of the black writer in America now is just to produce works of literature about whatever he wants to write about. . . . At least the world will be more informed about the black Americans' subconscious.—*Chester Himes, 1970.*

Paris, 1953. Three black American writers—Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Chester Himes—are sitting on the terrace of Les Deux Magots, drinking. All three have left home for France, where the dollar is strong and there is no apparent Jim Crow. The two older writers, Himes and Wright, have been summoned to Les Deux by the twenty-nine-year-old Baldwin; he has asked Wright to lend him a little cash, despite the fact that his renown is based, in part, on his savage public dissection of Wright's work. Baldwin has been almost as critical of Himes ("probably the most uninteresting and awkward prose I have read in recent years," he wrote of one Himes novel), but this is their first face-to-face encounter. Himes, in his autobiography, "The Quality of Hurt" (1972), recalls that, on arriving at the café, Wright "started right off needling Baldwin." He goes on, "Dick accused Baldwin of showing his gratitude for all he had done for him by his scurrilous attacks. Baldwin defended himself by saying that Dick had written his story and hadn't left him, or any other American black writer, anything to write about. I confess at this point they lost me."

This is hardly surprising. Unlike Baldwin, Himes had not felt personally threatened by Wright's novel "Native Son." Nor had he been much influenced by Baldwin's work. Those writers' somewhat sentimental depictions of sensitive men choking on their alienation were far removed from the version of black American maleness that Himes documented in seventeen novels and numerous short stories (many of which have been kept in print by Thunder's Mouth Press and Norton). "At times my soul

brothers embarrassed me, bragging about their scars, their poor upbringing, and their unhappy childhood, to get some sympathy and some white pussy and money, too, if they could," Himes wrote. "It was a new variety of Uncle-Toming." The archetypal Himes hero is still one of the few literary images we have of the distinctly urban black male who has little, if any, relationship to the Deep South and its legacy of violence, injustice, and forced segregation. Himes produced male characters who really were *noir*—in fact and in sensibility. Unapologetic and testosterone-driven, they weren't hard-done-by; they were in love with having been done wrong. Turned on by their own bravado, they claimed entitlement and viewed sex as a struggle for power—the only form of intimacy that engaged them. "Race was a handicap, sure . . . but, hell, I didn't have to marry it," says Bob Jones, one of Himes's narrators, before describing how he has used his skin color for financial gain. These are hardly the words of a Bigger Thomas. (When Jones is asked whether Bigger, the hero of "Native Son," is the appropriate symbol of Negro oppression, he responds, "Well, you couldn't pick a better person than Bigger Thomas to prove the point. But after you prove it, then what?")

Undoubtedly, Himes's detachment from the forces that shaped his fellow-writers had much to do with his own social entitlement. Unlike Wright or Baldwin, he was a child of the middle class. Privilege doesn't always cushion you from the sting of the lash, but it can act as a balm. Still, Himes was in constant rebellion against his background. He didn't want to become an academic, as one of his brothers had. He wanted to be a "real man," which is to say his idea of a real black man—one who, instead of living pressed up against the glass wall that separates him from everything he desires (white women, fast times, fast cars, a big slice of the American pie), shatters it. In a sense, Himes's



entire oeuvre can be read as an attempt to prove how black he really was, and to authenticate, *de facto*, that abstraction. Like Huey P. Newton, who threw a leather jacket over his cap and gown as he left the confines of Howard University, Himes was a romantic, a child of the bourgeoisie in love with the stars in the gutter—the “real life” on the other side of achievement.

Himes did not receive anything approaching recognition until he was past fifty and had embarked on the work for which he is still best known—the Harlem Cycle, a series of detective novels featuring two policemen called Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones. He was not a skilled literary politician, nor was he as adept as Baldwin and Wright at self-promotion. He had never been hungry enough or insecure enough to learn the game. So, on that Paris evening, he failed to recognize that his compatriots weren’t discussing the finer points of *literature*—that, unlike the former college boy sharing their table, Wright and Baldwin were gladiators by necessity, fighting, at Les Deux and in parlors around the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to establish whose spear was long enough to pierce their largely white audience’s consciousness, and anoint its wielder head literary Negro. Without those readers, Baldwin and Wright would be writing in the dark, with no hope of being admitted to the canon or the cocktail parties that mattered. They’d be out of it. They’d be Chester Himes.

Himes called the black American “the most neurotic, complicated, schizophrenic, unanalyzed, anthropologically advanced specimen of mankind in the history of the world,” and his exploration of that complicated character, in prose that is devoid of obvious lyricism and unencumbered by ideas that are not naturally woven into the fabric of the roiling narratives, accounts for his best work. He was writing about blacks’ relationship to whiteness some twenty years before Jean Genet gave us “Les Nègres,” before Baldwin gave us Rufus and his long-suffering white girlfriend in “Another Country,” and before John Cassavetes explored a “high yellow” woman’s psyche in the film “Shadows.” Himes’s most compelling books—“If He Hollers Let Him Go” (1945), “Lonely Crusade” (1946), “Cast the First Stone” (1953, later published in

RICHARD MERKIN



*Himes painted a picture that was often ugly but lit from within by his sense of truth.*





*"Hey, what if marriages had term limits?"*

an unexpurgated version as "Yesterday Will Make You Cry"), and "The Third Generation" (1954)—posed questions that few of his contemporaries dared to raise: What defines an "authentic" black voice? How can one create a literature about blackness without identifying with the underclass? Should one feel compelled to portray an experience that is not one's own? Should the black novelist promulgate a personal or a general politics? And, more important, maybe, what is the black man's relationship to that other marginalized class—white women? Himes loved, reviled, and tried to control a great many white women, on and off the page, perhaps because he regarded them as extensions of himself: a species of white nigger, or "wigger." It is Himes's attempt to record his thorny relationship to an oppression other than his own that accounts for some of his most troubled and troubling writing.

He came by it natural, as the elders used to say. Himes was born on July 29, 1909, in Jefferson City, Missouri, the youngest of three sons, to a mother, Estelle Bomar Himes, whom he described as a strong-willed, class-conscious "octoroon, or perhaps whiter." "I remember her as looking like a white woman who had suffered a long siege of illness," Himes wrote in "The Quality of Hurt,"

which remains the best source of information on his life. James Sallis's recently published study, "Chester Himes: A Life" (Walker; \$28), is disorganized and convoluted, and not the Himes biography we need. Estelle encouraged her sons to pinch their noses so that they wouldn't grow flat, and until they were adolescents she taught them at home, to spare them the effects of a substandard, segregated education and to keep them from socializing with other black children. She felt what amounted to a kind of physical disgust for her big-nosed, dark-skinned husband, the gentle and tolerant Joseph Sandy Himes, who was the head of the Mechanical Department at the all-black Lincoln Institute. Professor Himes was only one generation removed from slavery. (The name Himes likely derived from Heinz—Chester's grandfather had been a blacksmith for a Jewish slaveholder.) Estelle was only a couple of generations removed from her white English ancestry, which she lorded over her boys. She was someone, she implied, and her husband and progeny could be, too, if only they would work hard enough, and work to minimize their difference from her.

Professor Himes did work hard, relocating whenever and wherever there was a chance of professional advancement. By the time Chester graduated from East

High School, in Cleveland, where his parents had finally settled, he had lived in Alcorn, Mississippi; St. Louis, Missouri; and Pine Bluff, Arkansas (where Himes's favorite brother, Joe, was blinded in a science experiment), with a stopover in Augusta, Georgia. Much has been made of the price that the black middle class pays for its climb out of economic and political obscurity: segregation from lower-income blacks, frustration at not being able to assimilate into white society. In his seminal study "Black Bourgeoisie," E. Franklin Frazier examines the force that binds black strivers together—and how that glue can eventually stick to their children. Part of Himes's strength as an artist—and what further separated him from Wright, Baldwin, et al.—was the way in which he tried to catapult himself out of that particular conundrum. He did not write reverently about his class; he did not glorify blacks as persecuted underdogs. He painted a picture that was messy and often ugly, and that was lit from within by his own sense of truth. He wrote from the viewpoint of the "third generation"—not slaves, not strivers, but witnesses to the literal and figurative union of the Americas, city and country, white and black, despot and victim, thrashing it out on a marriage bed whose pillows are filled with reproach and recrimination.

"These aren't things that white people want to hear about," a friend who had read Himes's first novel told him. "Things like this need to be kept quiet, between colored people." In "Lonely Crusade," for instance, Luther, a Negro Communist organizer, invites Lee, the novel's black protagonist, home to meet his white girlfriend, and Himes exposes the domestic nastiness of the couple's alliance of race and class:

Sitting erect, she took the pins from her hair, plied her fingers through it, and let it cascade down about her neck and shoulders. Then she cooed: "Come to me, my intellectual Caliban, my strong, black apostle with the pygmy brain; come to me and make love to me, my dark, designing commissar."

"Body Marxist!" Luther said, turning his back to her.

"Then be an American Negro," she said laughingly, "and refill our glasses while I talk to Lee."

"And make love to 'im too," he muttered.

"At least give us time," she murmured.

"Lee might prefer women of his own race."

"Well—yes," [Lee] said.

"Such insolence! Such bourgeois puritanism!"



Himes both absorbed and felt victimized by his mother's "bourgeois puritanism," which was the bedrock of her racism and her elitism. And it's possible that he wrote his fourth novel, "The Third Generation," as a way of reimagining where he had come from and where he would stay: in the psychic throes of his parents' and the country's racial war. The novel's hero, William Taylor, is a black professor at a small Southern college, who marries a mixed-race belle. On their wedding night, the couple repair to a Negro hotel. The groom's sexual clumsiness enrages his bride, who twists his fumbblings into a form of rape. While trying to cope with the invasion, she imagines her white father's face floating above her. Bitterness is the flower that William and his wife will forever feed on, but what nourishment will their children have? And Chester Himes? Estelle, who was no flower?

Cleveland, 1926 to 1928: years marked by a kind of slapstick tragedy. Following his graduation from high school, in 1926, Himes found work as a busboy at the Wade Park Manor hotel. While flirting with two white co-workers, he walked into an open elevator shaft and fell forty feet, crushing three vertebrae and breaking his left arm and a number of teeth. He was awarded a disability stipend by the Industrial Commission of Ohio, and he enrolled at Ohio State University. There it was cars and clothes and gambling and the emergence of a reckless self, drawn to the bright sheen of low-down life, black pimps, and the lipstick-stained cigarette tips of the white girls who worked for them. He was attracted to the Gorky-like ugliness and desperation he found on the edge of Cleveland's ghetto, far from the order of home. Scovill Avenue was, he wrote, "the most degraded slum street I had ever seen." And the black women he found there were nothing like Mama: "The black whores on Scovill for the most part were past their thirties, vulgar, scarred, dim-witted . . . diseased and poverty stricken." White boys and immigrants—"hunkies"—were the chumps who went for this kind of woman, a startling rebuttal to Estelle's reverence for the "elevated" and discriminating white mind.

Himes withdrew from Ohio State after less than a year. Another kind of

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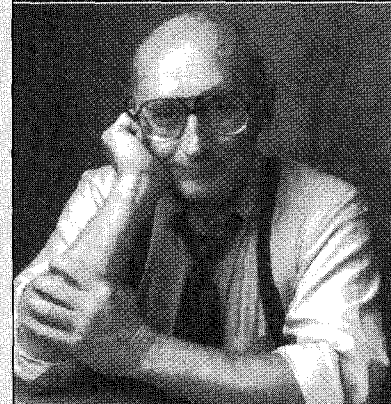
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education followed. A boy in hood's clothing, he worked at a whiskey joint and embarked on a life of petty crime. When he was found guilty of trying to rip off a Negro Y.M.C.A., his mother pleaded for clemency and got it. But no one could save him when he robbed a wealthy elderly couple in their home at gunpoint and was caught trying to pawn their jewels. Himes was arrested and, at the detective bureau, hung upside down and beaten on the ribs and testicles. He confessed to the crime and was sent to the Ohio State Penitentiary. "I was nineteen years old when I went in and twenty-six years old when I came out," he wrote. "I became a man, dependent on no one but myself." But even behind bars he was a product of his class: "The advantage I had over other black convicts was that I knew my own mind. Most of the black convicts were . . . stupid, uneducated, practically illiterate, slightly above animals. . . . I began writing in prison. That also protected me, against both the convicts and the screws." Himes does little in his autobiography to explain how he developed the concentration it must have taken to shut out that grim world and write. Nor does he say much about the authors he liked, other than admitting to a fondness for Dashiell Hammett and Faulkner.

Himes's earliest stories, published while he was still in jail, appeared in black publications—*Abbott's Monthly*, the *Atlanta World*, and the like—but in 1934 he began writing fictional pieces about prison life that were bought by *Esquire*. Fitzgerald and Hemingway—to name two of the magazine's famous contributors at that time—described the world of the bright and accomplished, out on safari, down on their luck. Himes wrote about the "nigger class," made invisible through incarceration. (Interestingly, the protagonists of these stories are never falsely accused; Himes made sure that, like him, they were serving time for crimes they had committed, thereby forestalling any possible liberal interpretation fuelled by notions of injustice.) In the best of these stories, "The Night's for Cryin'," a man named Black Boy suspects his woman, Marie, of getting together with an uppity "yellow nigger." Black Boy is one of the first of Himes's tough guys with heart, and the writer pays a deep, almost homoerotic attention to his physicality:

Standing, his body was big, his six foot height losing impressiveness in slanting shoulders and long arms like an ape's. He paused for a moment, undecided, a unique specimen of sartorial splendor—white Panama stuck on the back of his shiny shaved skull, yellow silk polo shirt dirtied slightly by the black of his bulging muscles, draped trousers of a brilliant pea green, tight waisted and slack hanging above size eleven shoes of freshly shined tan.

Black Boy finds Marie with her lover and kills him with a shiv. He is sent to death row. Himes concludes:

Marie comes to see him as often as they let her, brings him fried chicken and hot, red lips; brings him a wide smile and tiny yellow specks in her big, brown, ever-loving eyes. You can hear his assured love-making all over the range, his casual "honeybunch," his chuckling, contented laugh. . . .

It's at night, when she's gone and the cells are dark and death row is silent, that you'll find Black Boy huddled in the corner of his cell, thinking of her, perhaps in some other nigger's loving arms. Crying softly. Salty tears making glistening streaks down the blending blackness of his face.

"The Night's for Cryin'" is partly about the Ohio State Penitentiary, partly about the prison of race that Himes learned from his mother, the color scale by which blacks judge other blacks: yellow-skinned people are élitists; brown-skinned people are strivers; and anything darker is unspeakable. Even free, Himes implies, the black man is living in a jail that his own people have helped to build.

Himes was paroled in 1936, and in 1937 he married Jean Johnson, a woman he had known since before his arrest. Though he called her "the most beautiful brownskin girl I had ever seen," he treated Jean in "the most casual manner; sometimes I would leave her standing on a corner waiting for me hours on end." The couple were nominally together until 1952, and she supported him through the writing of his first two books, both of which Himes produced after he and Jean relocated to Los Angeles, in 1941. There Jean picked up work as a U.S.O. organizer, and Himes was hired as a reader at Warner Bros. but was soon dismissed, when, he claimed, Jack Warner announced, "I don't want no niggers on this lot." In Cleveland, the racism Himes had rebelled against was his mother's. In L.A., it was everywhere. He wrote, "Racism became an in-

escapable fact of life for me. I'd been able to ignore segregation up until then, but now I couldn't. I felt I could 'see' racism. . . . It was like a disease I couldn't shake." Over a period of three years, he held a total of twenty-three jobs, most of which involved manual labor. He also became a published novelist. In 1944, when he came to New York, he wrote, "I lost myself in sex and drunkenness. . . . I almost lost my wife, too . . . and when I came to, 'If He Hollers Let Him Go' had been published and well-received."

Like "The Night's for Cryin'," "If He Hollers" is a portrait of race as an economic and psychosexual prison—or padded cell. The novel takes place over a period of four days, during which its hero, Bob Jones, a shipyard worker in Los Angeles, faces a number of calamities: he is hoodwinked out of his job, framed for rape, beaten up by white workers, and antagonized by the police. His light-skinned fiancée refuses to help him escape, and Jones's only way out is to join the Army. What distinguishes this work from the start—setting it closer to Camus's "The Stranger" than to "Native Son" or "Invisible Man"—is that Jones's fear is predicated less on these events than on a fascination with his own marginalization. While he is concretely persecuted for being black, Jones seems, at times, more affected by the persecution he intuitively feels, by the racism that he observes and absorbs like a dirty sponge:

Maybe it had started [after] I'd seen them send the Japanese away. . . . It was taking a man up by the roots and locking him up without a chance. Without a trial. Without a charge. Without even giving him a chance to say one word. It was thinking about if they ever did that to me, Robert Jones, Mrs. Jones's dark son, that started me to getting scared. . . . I was the same color as the Japanese and I couldn't tell the difference. "A yellor-bellied Jap" coulda meant me too.

"The book is at war with itself, as is Jones, as is Himes, as is the American Negro," one critic wrote.

Himes's encoded emotional language presages the West Coast gangsta rap of Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, and Snoop Doggy Dogg, but the rapper with whom Himes has the closest rapport is Eminem, whose brand of rageaholism has incurred the wrath of gays and women, the legions of decents who also found Himes so disturbing. Eminem is white; Himes is middle-class; both feel marginalized within their



genres and fight to prove their ghetto legitimacy for their imaginary critics. "I just do not got the patience / To deal with these cocky caucasians / Who think I'm some wigger who just tries to be black. . . . / So they always keep asking the same fuckin' questions / What school did I go to, what hood I grew up in," Eminem raps. Eminem and Himes define themselves, in part, by saying no to everything that has shaped them—namely, households dominated by women. Eminem does what none of the black rappers he, to some degree, emulates would dare: he talks badly about his mama ("Shut up, slut, you're causin' too much chaos / Just bend over and take it like a slut, O.K., Ma?" he raps in "Kill You.") Similarly, in Himes's twisted Oedipal writing, Mama is no hardworking martyr by the stove; she is a deeply flawed and often irritating presence. In the history of black literature, where motherhood has become as much of a device as blackness itself, this portrait is anarchic to the point of chaos: Himes betrays family secrets in a way that betrays the black world as a whole.

For Himes's heroes, as for Himes himself, resentment toward the mother often spills over into relationships with other women, particularly white women, who exemplify both Estelle's élitism—the oppression of white society—and the despicable weakness of victimhood. Women are overbearing mother and clawing child in one. Attraction blurs into anger, and violence is sometimes the only way out. "Don't worry about that little booboo on her throat," Eminem's alter ego tells his daughter about her mother, whom he has just murdered. In "The Quality of Hurt," Himes records his response to a white woman whom he met on his way to France, and with whom he would later have an affair:

After two days I just wanted to lay her and have it done with. . . . Emotions between black men and white women are erratic, like a brush fire in a high wind. For a time they burn brightly, burning everything in their path; but they are subject to skip over green patches or turn abruptly about and flicker out on the ashes of what they have previously burned. So it was with me late that second night. I had reached the green patch of sexual necessity. Not so much that I desired her, I just wanted to shut her up.

Of another affair he writes, "The final answer of any black to a white woman with whom he lives in a white society is

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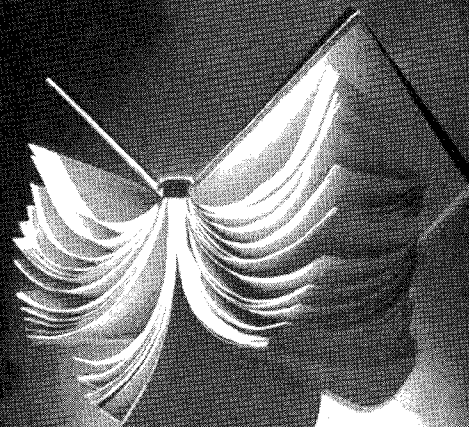
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violence. . . . It is presumed only right and justifiable for a black man to beat his own black women when they need it. But how much more does a black man's white woman need it; maybe she needed it when she became his woman."

In a scene that Himes's editors tried to excise from "If He Hollers," Jones confronts Madge, a white woman who works at the shipyard and refuses to have a "nigger" as her supervisor:

Then I moved in, trapped her against the door. . . . We tussled silently back and forth across the bed until we were both panting for breath. . . . She stopped struggling and went limp, and the strangest look came into her eyes.

"I dare you to, nigger," she said. "Just go 'head. I'll get you lynched right here in California."

"Aw, go to hell," I growled.

"My Gawddd, now you wanna beat me," she said. . . . "I don't know what made me let you in, you cruel black bastard."

She looked like hell. She was really a beat biddy, trampish-looking and pure rebbish; and since I'd already lost my live-wire edge, I wondered what the hell I'd seen in her in the first place.

Himes fetishized white women, and, like many fetishists, he saw the women he was involved with not as people but as props in the ongoing drama of Chester Himes. As Sallis writes in his biography, friends noticed that, in the case of a particularly disturbed German drama student Himes was involved with, "he perceived her only as a reflection or aspect of himself . . . while failing utterly to see what a troubled young woman she was." Himes couldn't stop apologizing for his preference, because ultimately it wasn't a preference but a pathology, one by which his white partners felt eroticized, too; being white with Himes, they felt both privileged *and* abused. Wright admired Himes's ability "to speak of love in terms of hate, and to use sex as a symbol of race pride." But there is no pride in Himes's fictional sexual affairs. Perhaps Wright wanted to see himself in Himes's work, but he wasn't prepared to deal with the core of Himes's psyche, which was, ultimately, so different from his.

The reviews of Himes's first two novels were mixed, and they did little to improve his beleaguered financial situation. After moving back to the East Coast, he worked at various jobs—as a caretaker in New Jersey, a bellhop in

the Catskills, a museum warehouseman in New York—and scraped by on his wife's earnings and the odd grant. Eventually, he decided to try his chances in France, where Wright was already living. Before leaving, Himes received a two-thousand-dollar advance for his novel "The Third Generation," and he separated from Jean. "The first thing I desired now that I had money was to sleep with a white woman," he notes in "The Quality of Hurt." His brother Joe elaborated in a 1983 interview: "He had come to the conclusion that it was impossible for a black person to succeed as a writer in this country. . . . I think Chester also perceived that a black wife would be a handicap in Europe. . . . So he said pragmatically, unemotionally, 'Jean has to go. I'm going forward.'"

In Europe in the late fifties, Himes embarked on his Harlem Cycle, which includes the comic "Cotton Comes to Harlem." In "Which Way Did He Go?," Edward Margolies argues that Himes's detective novels are unique because they are informed by a political fracture. "Coffin Ed and Grave Digger made their literary debuts at a critical period when civil rights and black-nationalist movements were under way," he observes. They "were torn, almost from the start, between their desire to protect Harlem's exploited citizenry and their feelings that the white power structure for whom they worked was the real enemy." (In this, Himes's work bears a distinct relationship to that of Rudolph Fisher, whose 1932 novel "The Conjure-Man Dies" is considered the first detective novel by a black American.) The Harlem Cycle won Himes an audience he had only dreamed of, and a place in the pantheon of the genre alongside Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Jim Thompson. But the writing tends to be formulaic, and it lacks the panic-inspiring, tough-minded sensibility that pervaded Himes's early work. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are ghetto survivors, but they don't have the unsettling complexity of Himes's more autobiographical heroes. Harlem was also less fertile ground for Himes as a writer: he had never really spent much time there, and L.A. was, much as he despised it, his terrain—beautiful, expansive, and invulnerable, like so many of his female protagonists. In "If He Hollers," he de-

scribes the city in language that lies somewhere between Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" and Ishmael Reed's "Mumbo Jumbo":

It was a bright June morning. The sun was already high. . . . The huge industrial plants flanking the ribbon of road—shipyards, refineries, oil wells, steel mills, construction companies—the thousands of rushing workers, the low-hanging barrage balloons, the close hard roar of Diesel trucks and the distant drone of patrolling planes, the sharp, pungent smell of exhaust that used to send me driving clear across Ohio on a sunny summer morning, and the snow-capped mountains in the background, like picture-postcards.

The Harlem novels didn't carry Himes into complete economic solvency, but movies based on them did. In the early seventies, he suffered a couple of disabling strokes. By that time, he had married Lesley Packard, an English photo librarian, and moved to Spain, where he died, in 1984, at the age of seventy-five. He was admired by figures as diverse as Ishmael Reed, Maya Angelou, Melvin Van Peebles, and John A. Williams (whose lengthy interview with Himes remains a wonderful source of the writer's voice). "My name had become a byword," Himes wrote. "I felt I had become more famous in Paris than any black American who had ever lived." Himes's career as a writer was not unlike his mother's ambition: fierce, but without real growth—especially when one considers the walls that were knocked down by Baldwin and Wright. His engaging, infuriating work succeeds because it forces the reader to pay attention; because it is brutal without apology; because it directly confronts race and passion, the guilt that can accompany them, and the pain of repudiation. In a 1948 speech entitled "The Dilemma of the Negro Writer in America," Himes responded to his critics: "If this plumbing for the truth reveals within the Negro personality homicidal mania, lust for white women, a pathetic sense of inferiority, paradoxical anti-Semitism, arrogance, Uncle-Tomism, hate and fear of self-hate, this then is the effect of oppression on the human personality. These are the daily horrors, the daily realities, the daily experiences of an oppressed minority." Himes's texts are, in the end, the bald, clumsy, and insightful attempts of a boy not to pay for his desire with shame. ♦



## BRIEFLY NOTED

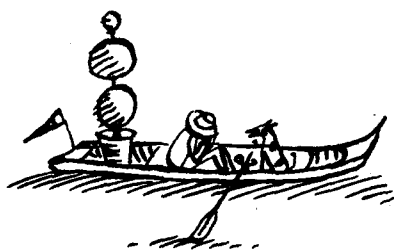
The Gardens of Kyoto, by *Kate Walbert* (Scribner; \$24). Like the gardens of its title, this debut novel is an exquisite conundrum, replete with ghosts and hiding places. Ellen, the self-effacing narrator, mourns the disappearance of her cousin on Iwo Jima during the Second World War, and tries to decipher a book he has left her about the Kyoto gardens. The beauty of these landscapes lies in their impenetrability: one, made up entirely of shadows, must be viewed at night; another may be seen only through a window whose blind is forever drawn. Similarly, Ellen stands on the fringes of other, more dramatic lives, first befriending a fellow-coed whose affair with a married professor ends in an illegal abortion, then falling in love with a traumatized veteran of the Korean War. In precise, delicate prose, the author renders with equal power the quiet desperation of a girl growing up in nineteen-fifties America—the football date with the soon-drunken stranger; the stupid, irretrievable thing said—and the ethereal: a man searching a cave for butterflies is surprised by the rustle of wings, like “some invisible woman catching her breath.”

America's Undeclared War, by *Daniel Lazare* (Harcourt; \$26). Lazare's crowded, noisy book about the nation's vexed relationship with its cities sits midway between history and polemic. As a tour through three centuries of urban America, it hits all the high points: Jefferson's anti-urban bias (complete with a surprising letter suggesting that yellow fever might be beneficial in reducing city populations); the complex effect of unions on the growth of nineteenth-century cities; and the influence of twentieth-century urban-planning gurus like Lewis

Mumford and Jane Jacobs. The final movement of the book, however, is given over to a detailed analysis of the pernicious effect of automobiles in American life. Lazare blames cars for both suburban sprawl and urban congestion, and proposes a stunning hike in the price of driving—without government subsidies, gas might cost as much as ten dollars per gallon—which is, he believes, the only way to genuinely reclaim and rebuild our cities.

Economic Sentiments, by *Emma Rothschild* (Harvard; \$45). This landmark work revisits the intellectual ferment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—a time when the brightest minds all talked like econ majors. Rothschild has delved through the pamphlets and tracts of the era—on everything from voting procedures to the suet trade—but the book is organized around the two greatest economic thinkers of the Enlightenment: Adam Smith and the Marquis de Condorcet. She dismantles, with quiet authority, the stereotype of the Enlightenment as a period dominated by chilly rationalists. In emphasizing the role of emotion in human life, the founders of modern economics were actually in advance of their successors.

The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery, and Meaning in an Ordinary Church, by *Margaret Visser* (North Point; \$27). The church on which Visser trains her curious, shrewd, and affectionate attention is Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura, which stands outside the walls of Rome. Dedicated to St. Agnes, who was martyred in 305 A.D., at the age of twelve, and built over a shrine containing her bones, the building has been in constant use for more than thirteen hundred years. Theology, etymology, mythology, art history, and necrology are just a few of the subjects the author addresses. Reading the church building itself as a text, she renders its language of marble and mosaic into a splendid narrative whose subject is how an architectural space “can both express and recall epiphany.”



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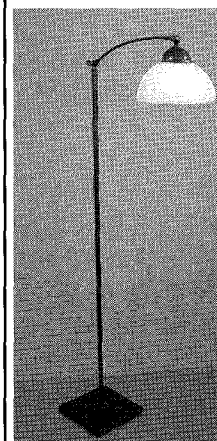
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# THE RIGHT STEPS

*How to become a choreographer, after Balanchine.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Even when George Balanchine was still alive, people wondered why he seemed to have bred no successors. Since his death, in 1983, they have been wondering harder. In a recent article in *Ballet Review*, Jeffrey Edwards, a former New York City Ballet dancer, proposed an answer. To work for Balanchine, he said, was to absorb his style to the point where it became automatic. This was good if you wanted to perform his ballets, less good if you wanted to choreograph your own. The danger, always, was that you would simply recycle his style—speak the words without the meaning. According to Edwards, the most innovative choreographers to have emerged from within N.Y.C.B. have been people who also had some competing dance experience, outside of Balanchine. I don't know whether you can take this as a rule—N.Y.C.B. hasn't produced enough interesting choreographers for any rules to be framed. But the company has at last come up with one really good choreographer, Christopher Wheeldon, and he does indeed have competing experience.

For example, he's English: born in Somerset, in 1973, the child of an engineer and a physical therapist. At the age of eight, he found his way to the local ballet school, where he started in a class consisting of him and fifteen girls. When he was eleven, he moved over to the Royal Ballet School, in London. In 1991, he graduated from there into the Royal Ballet, where he stayed for two years before leaving to join N.Y.C.B. He was a lovely dancer: gorgeous line, sweet face, sweaty bangs. (He worked hard.) But already, before he left England, he wasn't just dancing; he was choreographing. In the last ten years, he has created pieces for Boston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Colorado Ballet, the Royal Ballet and its school, and N.Y.C.B. and its school. In 1998, he was promoted to the rank of soloist at N.Y.C.B. Two years later, he retired from the stage. It was sad to see

him go, but cheering, too, because he quit dancing in order to have time to make dances. He intended to be a real choreographer, not a hobbyist. The company had just created a new position, artist-in-residence, and he was appointed to it. That is a one-year gig. But when it comes to an end, this month, Wheeldon will not go away, for N.Y.C.B. has now created the new post of resident choreographer for him, and there is no term limit.

This has been a steady rise, and well deserved. It's not just that Wheeldon makes lively ballets that seem to have some heart beating in them. It's that he has given us the pleasure of watching his progress as, in his mind, Balanchine's Russo-American thunderbolt crossed the sheltering sky of English ballet. Wheeldon is faithful to the English masters—above all, Frederick Ashton, but also Kenneth MacMillan—on whose work he was raised. Like them, he enjoys telling stories. (He has made a "Firebird" and a "Midsummer Night's Dream.") And, as with his English predecessors—not just Ashton but Jane Austen and George Eliot—his imagination is rooted in a firm secular morality. Ordinarily, when the curtain goes up on a Balanchine work we are not in the world. We see no sets, no role-defining costumes, no butcher or baker. Instead, we see ballet dancers dancing, and thereby making meanings that we can attach to life only by an intuitive leap. When the curtain opens on the average English ballet, and on a number of Wheeldon's ballets, there is a set, and there are costumes. We are in the world. In two of his recent works, we are in the world of ballet: in the classroom or backstage. The very fact that he sees ballet as a place marks a huge difference from Balanchine, to whom ballet was no more a place than air is to a bird. Wheeldon doesn't always tell stories; he makes non-narrative ballets. But they, too, have the feel of a story. The dancers seem like human types, with recog-

nizable emotions, working things out.

So Wheeldon has an English ancestry—I like him better for being true to it—but his imagination has been retrained by Balanchine's work. Like Balanchine (like Ashton, too, actually), he is superlatively musical, and works in easy intimacy with his scores, tucking steps between the beats, against the beat, and then, when he needs to, coming down, smack, on the beat. Another thing he seems to have acquired from Balanchine is a mastery of stage space. Indeed, at this point, he has an obsession with stage space, a passion he shares with his favorite designer, Ian Falconer. His 1999 "Scènes de Ballet" was set in a studio, with a pair of practice barres running the diagonal of the stage and the dancers on each side performing opposite steps, as if one group were the reflection of the other in the studio's mirror. In "Variations Sérieuses," which had its première earlier this month, the set was contrived in such a way that we seemed to be looking on from the stage-left wing, watching a ballet within a ballet and, at the same time, witnessing the little backstage dramas—dancers quarrelling, spraying their hair, rubbing their sore feet—occurring in counterpoint to the ballet. These manipulations of the stage space are rather fancy, not to speak of limiting. (In "Scènes de Ballet," the mirror conceit left him with a triangular half stage to put his dances in.) But they're fun, and I think they're part of Wheeldon's self-education. In most of his ballets, the space is the regular old square; it's just more interesting than in other people's work. Vertical lines charge through horizontals. Arcs become circles, spirals. The dancers emerge from the wings in a single line and then, on a beat, scatter across the stage in a butterfly formation. The space is plastic, elastic, alive.

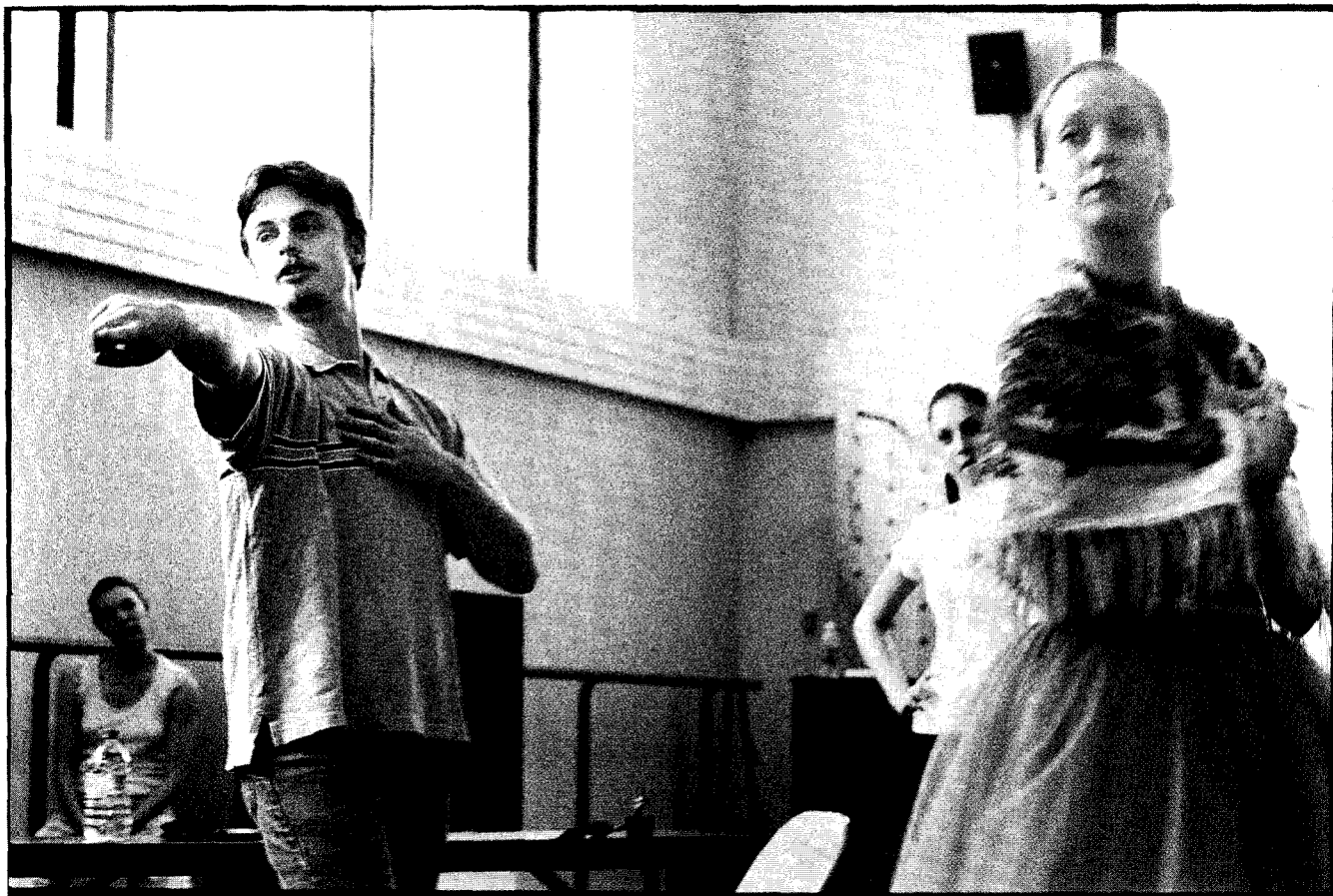
Wheeldon's most obvious link to Balanchine, however, is his steps: his dancers do bold, modern-looking movements that are nevertheless true to the classical style—glissade, assemblé, pas de bourrée. That is their language, and they speak it with a gracious accent reminiscent of Balanchine. Lincoln Kirstein once wrote of Balanchine, "His unmistakable signature is his masterful designs for tenderness, regret of loss, mystery, exuberance and human consid-



eration." Wheeldon, at twenty-eight, does not yet stand on that high peak, but one of the most striking features of his work is its sheer decency of feeling. Even in a comic ballet such as "Variations Sérieuses," which is a replay of the old story where the monstrous diva gets injured and the novice has to go on in her place, everyone is treated with charity. You sort

the anguished couple, the woman, Wendy Whelan, does a full three-hundred-and-sixty-degree backbend over her partner's body, her legs opening and closing in the air like scissors. Later, this step is reprised, as a *lift*. Jock Soto turns Whelan three hundred and sixty degrees in the air. I had never seen such a thing before. (Neither had the rest of the audi-

the school eager and strong. Soon they seem weakened, hidden. Perhaps Wheeldon can reverse that trend. Whelan has never had a better role made for her than the one in "Polyphonia." As for Ansell, she was a whole new person—not the little yum-yum that she is normally asked to be, but a soul. Likewise, last season, in "Mercurial Manoeuvres," Mi-



Artist-in-residence Christopher Wheeldon working with dancers at New York City Ballet. Photograph by Michael James O'Brien.

of love the diva, not to speak of the cute novice. In its tone this piece is a far cry from its primary model, Antony Tudor's "Gala Performance," in which the divas really are monsters. In fact, it's too far a cry. The satire seems to peter out halfway through. The piece could use a good murder or something. Still, amid the moral nullity of most of the recent repertory at N.Y.C.B., Wheeldon's kind spirit is welcome.

In my favorite of his ballets, last season's "Polyphonia," set to piano pieces by György Ligeti—it will be performed three times this week—there are four couples, each involved in a drama of some dignity: one anguished, one caught in a sort of smoky mystery, and so on. Wheeldon has made thrilling steps for them. In

ence. They gasped.) The mystery-bound couple is less sensational, and more touching. The woman, Alexandra Ansell, stands in front of her partner, Craig Hall, and drifts to the side in bourrée, the gliding step. He stops her, and she drifts to the other side. Gently, gently, she cannot stop leaving him. Soon he is gone, and she bourrées along through near darkness, raising and lowering her arms, caught in some potent spell.

These dances have the luminous ambiguity that is the sole province of ballet. They are a gift to us, and, even more, to the dancers. In order to develop, dancers must be given serious roles, preferably roles made for them. For years now, N.Y.C.B.'s young talent has been withering on the vine. The dancers arrive from

randa Weese was poignant, Edwaard Liang glamorous, even sexy—qualities they had never revealed before.

It's dangerous to praise young artists too highly. But Wheeldon is not so young, and he has made twenty-two ballets. For the record, let me say that he has faults. His pas de deux are sometimes overingenious (though he seems to be getting past this). He can be derivative (though his borrowings are so frank as to be tributes rather than thefts). His goodness of spirit could dead-end in mere charm, the *mal anglais*. He's a bit conservative. I wish he'd do something weird now and then. That said, one should add that he is the best thing to have happened to New York City Ballet in almost twenty years. ♦



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## THE THEATRE

## VAMPING TILL READY

Warren Leight's new jazz reverie is more stiff than riff.

BY JOHN LAHR

Three years ago, the playwright Warren Leight, whose father played trumpet for the Buddy Rich band in the fifties, wrote the Broadway hit "Side Man," a sort of jazz family romance about growing up in the topsy-turvy hip world and the emotional consequences of a wiggly parent's being "gone." In "Side Man," Leight's father was more a

Marty's trombone-playing protégé, Jordan Shine (Scott Cohen), is explaining how, at a wedding gig in Greenwich, Connecticut, he met and fell for one of the wedding guests, a pert marketing executive called Delia (Seana Kofoed), who turns out to be Marty's niece—the daughter of his estranged twin brother, Daniel (Brian Kerwin), who, along with



"Glimmer" is best when it lets the wisecracking wastrel Marty (John Spencer) rip.

sound than a presence. In the newest installment of Leight's jazz reverie, "Glimmer, Glimmer, and Shine" (at the Manhattan Theatre Club, directed by Evan Yionoulis), the father figure, a trumpeter named Marty Glimmer (the superb John Spencer), with a voice as dishevelled as his appearance, is more a presence than a sound. Marty is the louche, unrepentant personification of the bohemian hipster. (His coffee table is a garbage can about to happen; his sink evidently has more things growing in it than a petri dish.) Forever the renegade, Marty holds nothing back; he relays it as one imagines he plays it—flat out and full tilt.

The cool world and the straight world collide as the curtain comes up.

Marty and Jordan's father, toured in the fifties as the eponymous Glimmer, Glimmer, and Shine—"the glow-in-the-dark trumpet section." (Let's suspend our disbelief for at least this paragraph, O.K.?) After the group fell apart, Marty stuck to jazz's romantic, druggy, penurious, crooked way, while Daniel, now a successful textile manufacturer, renounced music (his daughter doesn't even know she has an uncle) and walked the repressed, buttoned-down straight road all the way to the bank. On this sketchy coincidence hangs Leight's slim tale.

While it is probably true that in love and in music there's no accounting for taste, it's hard to imagine that the raffish and charming Jordan is even remotely drawn to such a smug, soulless, spoiled,

JAMES McMULLAN



manipulative Bergdorf Goodman package as Delia, who has had the rogue gene bred out of her by her upwardly mobile parents. As a storyteller, Leight paints himself into a fascinating corner. He must make his heroine witty enough to engage the audience. "The ceremony was High Wasp," Delia says of the wedding where she had her first romantic encounter with Jordan. "A three-tenter: I forsake, you forsake, kiss kiss now can we drink? Amen." But the satiric idiom doesn't jibe with Delia's spectacular vapidness. "I've never understood the point of irony," she says. (How could she? She lives in a world without limits.) When Delia and her newfound uncle are finally introduced, Marty asks if her father still has his chops. Delia answers—I'm afraid I didn't mishear—"He doesn't eat meat." No human being in Western civilization, I contend, would make such an asinine retort. The joke is supposed to indicate Delia's squareness; but what it really shows is the kind of authorial, sitcom pandering that is the cancer that eats at the marrow of this play. Leight believes that he is making his heroine amusingly naïve; in fact, he makes her oafish. At one point, Delia breaks off canoodling with Jordan to say, "I've never been kissed by someone who's in therapy before." What planet does this character live on? Come to think of it, given her emotional vacancy, the answer must be Planet Hollywood.

Leight loves Marty, and the evening is best when it contrives to let the wise-cracking old wastrel rip, leaving behind the constraints of the formulaic plot for a verbal solo, which Spencer, with his gruff tones, elevates to a kind of ontological cool. When Marty collapses and is rushed to the hospital—he calls it "Our Lady of the Perpetual Invoice"—Leight finds his moment. "I hate comas," Marty says as he strolls around the stage in an out-of-body experience. "I don't mind the needles, mind you. Anytime anyone brings a syringe near me, I perk up. Force of habit—no pun intended."

But by this time the melodrama of reunion and romance is kicking in. Jordan is balking at Delia's penchant for

pricey restaurants and brother Danny is at Marty's bedside, offering to get him a better doctor. When Marty confesses that he's in "a Thomas Wolfe situation—I can't go home again," Danny even reluctantly offers up the company condo. Around this centerpiece, Leight stitches the shreds of his story: Jordan learns that Delia is engaged, a fact she has hidden from him until now. She has wiped her fiancé out of the story as effectively as her mother, Martha, "airbrushed" Marty out of the family picture decades earlier, because—as we learn—she mistakenly believed that in his strung-out state on the road he never relayed to Danny the sad news of her miscarriage. Danny, who was on a two-day bender at the time, never had the courage to disabuse her of this notion.

Although the plot factors out, it is never acted out. Recently, a few dyspeptic readers have written to plead that I not reveal the plots of plays I review. I don't agree with them, but in this case I'll make an exception. Do Delia and Jordan get together? Do the brothers finally come to terms? Will Martha return from her spiritual quest in Nepal and reunite with Danny, or will they separate? Tune in next week. But I will tell you the play's message. It comes in the very last beat. Jordan hands Delia a photo that Marty has left for her—it's of Glimmer, Glimmer, and Shine in their groove (an image that is mirrored in the backdrop of Neil Patel's attractive set), and it captures Delia's mother and Jordan's father "trysting," as the tabloids used to say in the fifties, when illicit sex still had a sense of sin to it, on a night-club banquette. The photo works as a kind of grace note that allows Marty the last say. In a message scribbled on the back of the photo, he forgives his brother, thanks the youngsters for existing, and leaves Delia with the jazz credo—and Marty's motto—"Never settle." These words, which are supposed to haunt the play as an inspiration, hang over it like a curse. The play's clichéd plot, its glib laughter, and even the relentlessly middlebrow venue where it's being staged have compromise written all over them. ♦

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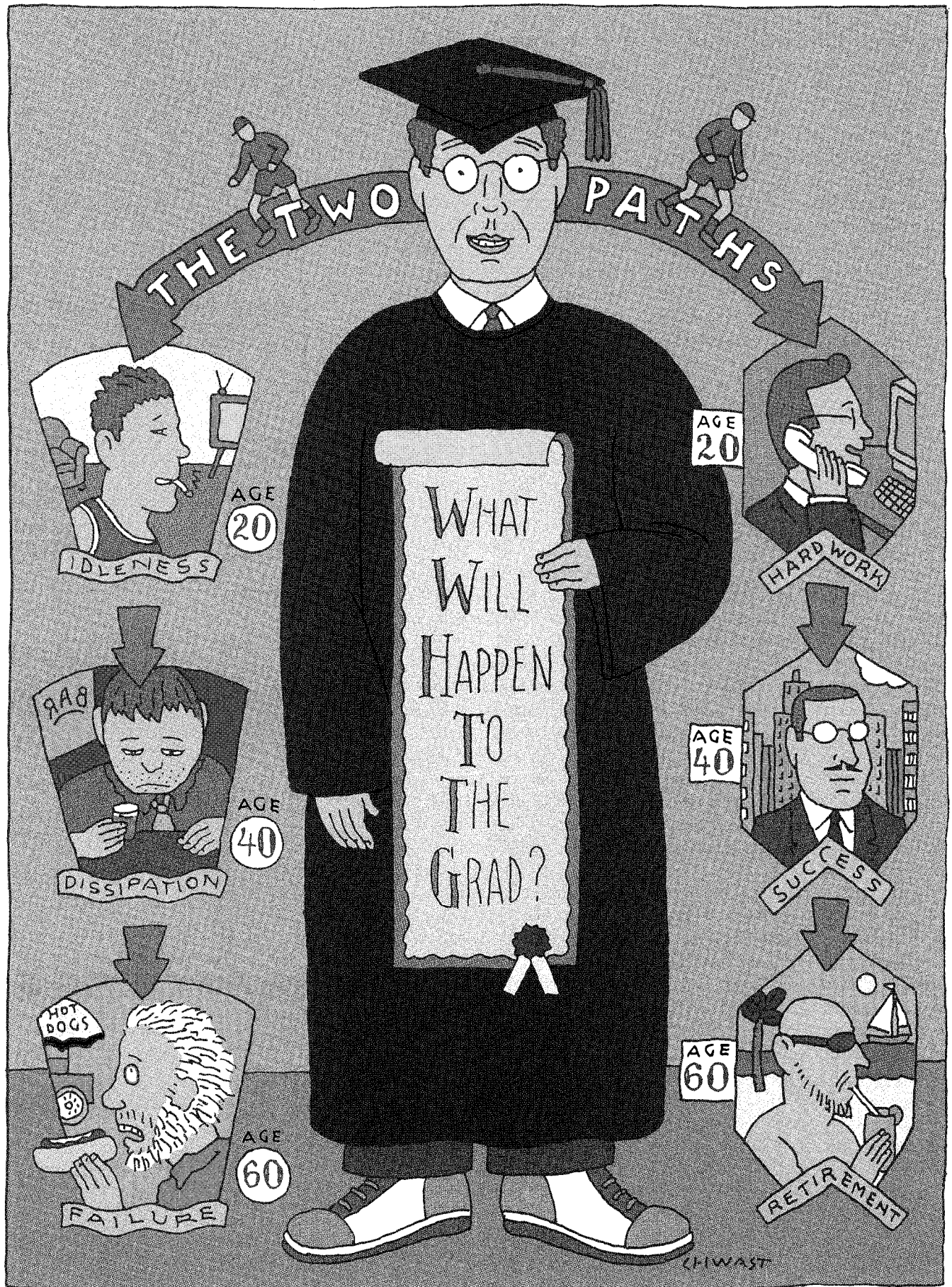
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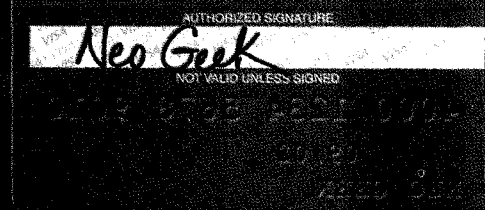


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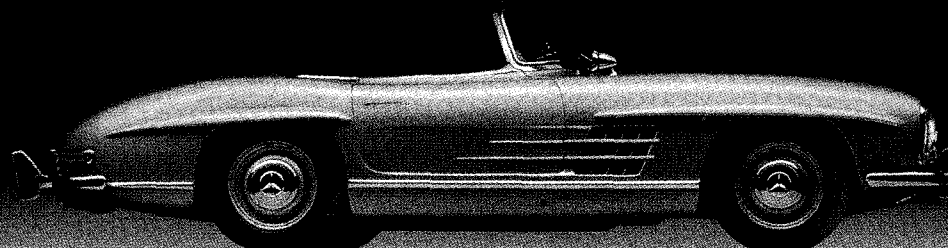


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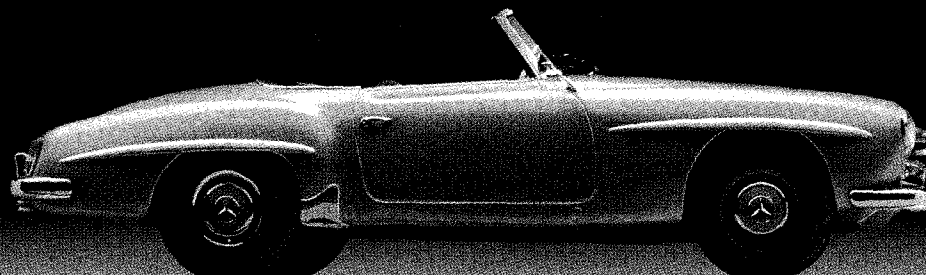




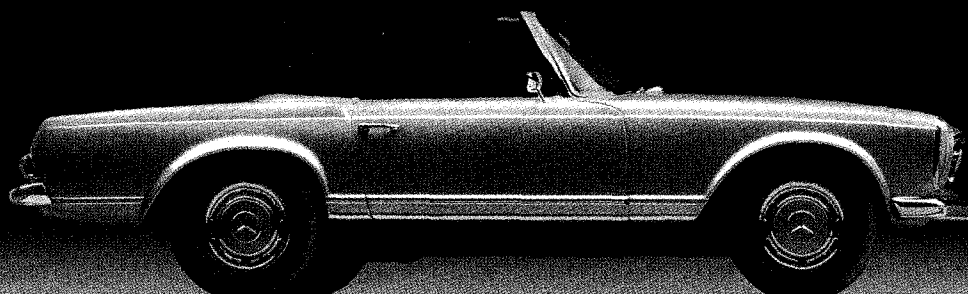
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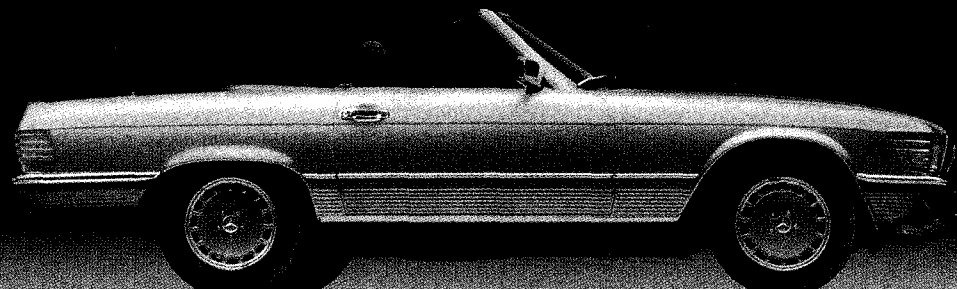
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